

Leo Strauss

ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS*

A course offered in the autumn quarter 1967, the Department of Political Science, University of
Chicago

Table of Contents

Session 1: Introduction; <i>Politics</i> , Book 1, chapters 1 and 2	1
Session 2: Book 1, chapter 2	15
Session 3: Book 1, chapters 2-7	28
Session 4: Book 1, chapters 8-11	46
Session 5: Book 2, chapters 7-12	65
Session 6: Book 2, chapters 1-6	82
Session 7: Book 3, chapters 1-6	98
Session 8: Book 3, chapters 7-18	114
Session 9: Book 4, chapters 1-7	131
Session 10: Book 4, chapters 8-16	144
Session 11: Book 4, chapters 12-16 revisited; book 5, chapters 1-7	159
Session 12: Book 5, chapters 3-12	173
Session 13: Book 6, entire	189
Session 14: Book 7, chapters 1-9	206
Session 15: Book 7, chapters 10-17	225
Session 16: Book 8, entire	242
Endnotes	258

Editorial Headnote

The course was taught in a seminar form. Strauss began class with general remarks; a student then read aloud portions of the text, followed by Strauss's comments and responses to student questions and comments. The text assigned for this course was Ernest Barker, *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). Nonetheless, most of the passages read aloud in class are from Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944); unless indicated otherwise, all passages read aloud are from Rackham's translation.

When the text was read aloud in class, this transcript records the words as they appear in either Barker's or Rackham's translation. Original spelling has been retained. In footnotes, the editor has indicated changes in the translation read from. The reader substitutes Strauss's preferred translation for the following words: "city" for "state" and "*politea*" for "constitution." These substitutions are noted in the first instances but not in subsequent instances.

There are no surviving audiotapes of this course. This transcript is based on the original transcript, made by persons unknown to us, which can be consulted in the Leo Strauss archive in Special Collections at the University of Chicago Library. Ellipses retained from the original transcript appear without square brackets; ellipses in square brackets indicate instances in which the transcriber noted "inaudible."

Footnotes have been provided to identify persons, texts, and events to which Strauss refers.

Table of Contents

Session 1: Introduction; <i>Politics</i> , Book 1, chapters 1 and 2	1
Session 2: Book 1, chapter 2	15
Session 3: Book 1, chapters 2-7	28
Session 4: Book 1, chapters 8-11	46
Session 5: Book 2, chapters 7-12	65
Session 6: Book 2, chapters 1-6	82
Session 7: Book 3, chapters 1-6	98
Session 8: Book 3, chapters 7-18	114
Session 9: Book 4, chapters 1-7	131
Session 10: Book 4, chapters 8-16	144
Session 11: Book 4, chapters 12-16 revisited; book 5, chapters 1-7	159
Session 12: Book 5, chapters 3-12	173
Session 13: Book 6, entire	189
Session 14: Book 7, chapters 1-9	206
Session 15: Book 7, chapters 10-17	225
Session 16: Book 8, entire	242
Endnotes	258

Session 1: October 2, 1967

Introduction: Aristotle, *Politics*, Book 1, chapters 1 and 2

Leo Strauss: For the second meeting we shall read book 1, chapters 1 through 7, in Barker's translation. That is the edition which you are supposed to use.ⁱ

Third meeting: book 1, chapter 8 through the end of book 1.

Fourth meeting: book 2, chapters 1 through 6.

The chapter given is always that used by Barker. In different editions they use different chapters.

Fifth meeting:	Book 2, chapter 7 to the end of the book.
Sixth meeting:	Book 3, chapters 1 to 10.
Seventh meeting:	Book 3, chapter 11 to the end of the book.
Eighth meeting:	Book 4, chapters 1 through 9.
Ninth meeting:	Book 4, chapter 9 to the end of the book.
Tenth meeting:	Book 5, chapters 1 to 7.
Eleventh meeting:	Book 5, chapter 8 to the end of the book.
Twelfth meeting:	Book 5; that's a relatively short one.
Thirteenth meeting:	Book 7, chapters 1 through 9.
Fourteenth meeting:	Book 7, chapter 10 to the end of the book.
Fifteenth meeting:	Book 8.

So we would still have an additional meeting, but I'm sure that we will have to spread out a bit in the course of the quarter.¹

Now let us then turn to more interesting things. I begin at the beginning; that is, I assume that there are some among you who have never even heard the name of Aristotle. Now Aristotle's *Politics*, which is the political work of Aristotle, is the first work devoted to political science in existence. Plato's famous works, *The Republic* and the *Laws*, are of course older than Aristotle's *Politics*, but they are dialogues, something between dramas and scientific works. Aristotle's *Politics* is the first scientific work simply on politics which we have.

Now the first question which we should raise is: Why should we study this work? Physicists, up-to-date physicists, do not study Newton, and still less Aristotle's *Physics*. Why should up-to-date political scientists study Aristotle's *Politics*? One could strengthen this argument by the following consideration. Aristotle knew the political life of his time and of the time preceding his, the² [world] of what³ [we] would call the Greek city-states. Now our political life is radically different, as enumeration of some of the subjects of interest easily shows: atomic age, the urban problem, cultural revolution in China, black power, integration, disarmament, and so on and so on—subjects of which Aristotle did not even dream.

ⁱ *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

Why should we then have any interest in Aristotle's *Politics*? Older natural sciences, whether it is physics, or chemistry, or biology, have become obsolete. Why has the political teaching of Aristotle not become obsolete in the same way? Or could it be that the problem which politics has to solve is fundamentally the same despite all the profound changes which have occurred in the environment of man? Could Aristotle's *Politics*, despite the obsolescence of many things these days, still be relevant to our understanding of political things and therefore also ultimately to our political action? Now to see that this might be the case, let us remind ourselves of the overall objective of contemporary American politics, if we can speak of that. I think we can speak of that if we assume for a moment that the spokesman for contemporary American politics for the time being is still President Johnson. President Johnson has spoken some years ago of his objective as the Great Society. The Great Society doesn't mean the big society,⁴ though it probably implies [that], but it means greatness [in] the same [way] as when people say, "That's great, that's wonderful." So I think it would be a bit more precise to say the Good Society. Now the good society⁵ raises a question, of course: What is the good society? There are to begin with perhaps as many opinions as voters. It is a question what the good society is. This question is paramount in Aristotle's *Politics* as much as it should be for us today.

So if it is true that politics has this concern with the good society and therefore implies an answer to the question of what a good society is, then there is some relevance of what Aristotle is concerned with. But one thing is contemporary political life, another thing is contemporary political science. What is the status of the question of the good society in contemporary political science? I suppose the most common answer would be that this question belongs not to political science but to something called political philosophy. In other words, there is now a very common view that political science is something different from political philosophy. This point I must emphasize, because the first step which we must take if we want to understand Aristotle is that we must go back behind the distinction between political philosophy and political science, and even behind the distinction⁶ [between] philosophy and science. This will become clear to us while we read the *Politics*, but I think I should announce it from the very beginning.

The distinction between philosophy and science is an outcome of the intellectual revolution directed against Aristotle in the seventeenth century, and this very successful, immensely successful intellectual revolution led to the distinction between philosophy and science. It is not a distinction which we can presuppose anywhere before the eighteenth century. Now when we distinguish between philosophy and science in general, or between political philosophy and political science, we imply, if we are honest, that science is not philosophical and philosophy is not scientific. And given the immense authority which science enjoys in our age, it means of course that philosophy and in particular political philosophy is something intellectually contemptible, and therefore it is frequently identified in our age with that contemptible thing called ideology, ideology meaning originally in the way in which it has become popularized by Marx, an untrue view of the world that present-day Marxists call their own Marxist doctrine. "Ideology" one can regard as an ironical admission on their part that their doctrine is not true, but I believe if one is fairer to them, it is that they are thoughtless people, and they've forgotten their own tradition. So at any rate, philosophy in general, and political philosophy, has become⁷ rather dubious on the basis of [a] distinction between philosophy and science.

Let us then forget about political philosophy and limit ourselves to political science. Now what is the status of the question of the good society in contemporary political science? For those who are still young and wholly uncorrupted, I must tell them right away that it doesn't have a status at all, because the first step when you enter the halls of present-day political science is to learn the distinction between facts and values. Value questions are not susceptible of a rational or reasonable answer. They are decided in some other way, in the most common view by your emotions, but they are not susceptible to [a] rational answer. Therefore the question of the good society is not susceptible to this kind of answer. Now this distinction between facts and values, this exclusion of value judgments from the realm of political science, leads to a number of difficulties, into which I do not have to go now and cannot go now, but I just state this as a matter of fact: that it is not feasible, however solid the reasons may be supporting the distinction, it is in practice not feasible to throw out value judgments from political science. Therefore there is an alternative available in present-day political or social science according to which you cannot throw out the values but you simply have to accept the values of your society or the most progressive part of your society, whatever that may be, and without it you cannot talk reasonably about political things. Here of course you have the great difficulty that you must form a judgment about the values of your society. You must form a judgment about the values of the most progressive part of your society because there is no reason why your society, and the most progressive part of your society, should be right. They are very nice people, but this doesn't prove that they are right.

So therefore it becomes necessary, because of this difficulty with which we are confronted in daily life within political science, that we either have to abandon the need to find rational answers to value questions or to make the impossible attempt to answer the question of the true values by referring to the values accepted by our society or some part of it. Given this state of affairs, we look around for some support; and since we do not find it at the present time, we return to earlier thought and see whether these men up to roughly the year 1900, who took it for granted that there can be a rational value judgment, did not have a point which for one reason or the other has been forgotten in the last sixty years.

But to return to which point: to Jeremy Bentham, who surely had no doubt that rational value judgments are possible? Or Hobbes, Machiavelli, Aristotle? So we must have a clearer principle of selection than we have seen. Now when we think about the fact–value distinction as now practiced, or rather demanded, we observe one thing: that this distinction becomes so important the moment we enter political science. In political life there is no question, and the citizen does not make a distinction between⁸ [factual] and value judgment. He regards a statement that X,⁹ say, a politician, [is] a crook and [a statement that] X is six feet tall as not logically different. In one case we are taking a measurement; in the other we have to look at his actions; and both statements are empirically verifiable. So for the citizen's understanding—some people would say for the commonsense understanding—the distinction between facts and values does not arise.

Now I make this assertion which perhaps I will prove in the course of the seminar. The book which presents the commonsense understanding of political things, the citizen's understanding of political things in contradistinction to the scientific understanding,¹⁰ is Aristotle's *Politics*. In

Aristotle's *Politics* we observe the transition from the commonsense citizen understanding to something which can be more scientific understanding, whereas in later ages and especially today such a clear transparent evident transition from the one to the other is not to be found.¹¹ We can bring this together with a very important difference between Aristotle—and by the way, also Plato—and all later political philosophy and science. Plato and Aristotle left the foundation for what we call political science or political philosophy or ethics, whereas all later thinkers built on the foundation. Now those who build on a foundation may make great progress beyond the founders, and very important progress, but they are not under a necessity to lay the foundation to make this great step from prescientific or prephilosophic thought to scientific or philosophic thought. Plato and Aristotle were under such a necessity. Plato and Aristotle did not have to refer to a tradition of political philosophy.¹² This tradition which was established by Plato and Aristotle was attacked in modern times, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was rejected with great violence. But this does not mean that these people, like Machiavelli, like Hobbes, were not deeply under the influence of their tradition. You only have to read in Hobbes, for example, when he says how he began his inquiries. He says: "I started from the definition of justice, according to which justice is [. . .] to give everyone his due."ⁱⁱ He starts from the definition of justice. But in Plato and Aristotle [this] would be the result of very long and complex investigations; and this we could say is a kind of guarantee that Hobbes's work, in spite of its great merits, is bound to be very superficial compared with that of Plato and Aristotle. Now these are roughly the reasons why we should study the *Politics*, as the work that founded political science or political philosophy and from which we may very well have to learn something of greatest importance.

I must now say a word or two about how we should study the *Politics*. Now one thing is trivial, but it still must be said. We should study it carefully and open-mindedly, not believing that we possess wisdom; and when Aristotle says something which does not agree with our opinions, [not] regard this as sufficient reason for throwing him or his book out the window. We must consider the possibility that Aristotle is right. We must acquire the habit of learning, not about him but from him, and not try to find a niche for him in the history of human thought. Nor must we try to explain Aristotle's thought in terms of his society, or his social status, or his life history, including his infantile history. One cannot explain anything if one does not know the thing to be explained; otherwise, you do not explain the thing to be explained¹³ [but rather] the figment of your imagination. So therefore you have first to see what Aristotle says and teaches and try to understand it; and then if you see that it is on good grounds that he was wrong on important points, then you are entitled and even obliged to say why did he make this amazing error and then perhaps his society can come in as a help to explain.

Now then let us come a further step closer to Aristotle, towards the *Politics*. And this step we take by noticing that the *Politics* is a sequel to another [book] which it presupposes, and that

ⁱⁱ For the quotation Strauss seems to have had in mind, see Hobbes, *De Cive*, Epistle Dedicatory, in *Man and Citizen*, ed. Bernard Gert (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 93–93: "when I applied my thoughts to the investigation of natural justice, I was presently advertised from the very word *justice* (which signifies a steady will of giving every one his *own*), that my first enquiry was to be, from whence it proceeded that any man should call anything rather his *own*, than *another man's*." See also chapter 15 of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 101.

other book is the *Ethics*, or to be more precise, one particular version of Aristotle's *Ethics*, called the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Now I think we should read a few pages in the *Ethics*, and Barker has in his appendix a translation of the passages.

Reader:ⁱⁱⁱ

"The conception—"

LS: Yes. But not what Barker has. We want to read Aristotle himself . . . well, I don't know. Well, I read you a few passages right at the beginning.

"Every art and every way of inquiry and in the same way also every action and choice is thought to strive after some good; and the good after which is being strived is the end . . . Now there appears a variety of ends, and this variety corresponds to the fact that there are many actions, many arts, and many sciences. For instance, medicine has the end of health, shipbuilding has the ship or boat, the military art victory, the economic art wealth . . . Now if the end is the thing for the sake of which we will something, and the other things are willed for the sake of the end [. . .] means, and we do not choose all things for the sake of something else, because this would be a regress into the infinite, it follows then that the end will be the good and the best . . . We must therefore try to find out what this end is, and this end would appear to be the object of the most authoritative and the most architectonic arts.^{iv}

The lower ends are [the] subject of lower arts. The highest and ultimate end would be the subject of the highest art, which is related to the other arts as the architect's art is [to] that of the other men engaged in building.

This art seems to be the political art."

Good. We leave it at this place in the beginning; and now we turn to the end, which is in Barker, but [. . .] where it precisely is.

Reader: Book 10, chapter 9.

LS: At the end. Yes. At the very end of the book.

Reader: Barker, page 355.

If these subjects—the nature—

LS: No, we don't need that.

ⁱⁱⁱ It is likely that the reader was Donald Reinken, who served as reader in many of Strauss's courses. He begins to read the heading of Barker's translation of the opening of Aristotle's *Ethics* provided on page 354 of the assigned text; Strauss then interrupts to provide what appears to be his own translation.

^{iv} *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1–2, 1094a1–28. Ellipses indicate that Strauss left out portions of the text; ellipses in brackets indicates "inaudible."

Reader: Page 358.^v

Article 21. [. . . an analogy.]^{vi} We do not find that treatises are able to make men doctors; and yet their authors not only attempt to state the treatments—they also try to distinguish different types of physical condition, and to explain how particular sorts of patients may be cured and ought to be treated. [Even so,]^{vii} medical treatises are regarded as helpful only to experienced doctors and useless for the inexperienced. [What is the lesson of this?] It would appear to be this. Collections of different laws—and of different constitutions—are useful to those who are able to speculate, and to form a judgement on the questions, ‘Which of these different results has been properly attained, and which not?’, and ‘Which of these results is in harmony with which?’; but those who peruse such collections without that ability and habit of mind will not be in a position to form a good judgement (except by chance^{viii})—though they may possibly become in the process more intelligent in such matters.

Article 22. Previous thinkers have left this subject of legislation unexplored; and it may therefore be proper that we should examine it—along with the general subject of ‘polity’—in order that our philosophy of things human may be completed to the best of our power. We may therefore attempt (1) to review any contributions of value made by our predecessors, on any particular point, and (2) to determine, in the light of the descriptions of polities which we have collected, the factors which preserve or destroy states, the factors which preserve or destroy each several type of polity, and the reasons why some states are well governed and others not. When we have studied these subjects, we may perhaps be in a better position (3) to decide what type of polity is the best or ideal, how each type must be constructed in order to attain its best, and what laws and customs it must employ to that end. With that we may begin.

LS: Thank you. So Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Ethics* that this master art, master science, architectonic art, is political; and at the end he calls it the philosophy regarding the human things. This is one great enterprise, the first part of which is supplied by Aristotle in his *Ethics* and the second part in the *Politics*. It is impossible to study in a single quarter the two books. It is even impossible to study properly one of them, but at least one can make the attempt, so we will turn to the *Politics*.

Now when this passage from the end of the *Politics* was read to you, the term “state,” “states” occurred. Here is a point which we must understand before we even open Aristotle’s book. There is no such word in Aristotle. The word which Aristotle uses is the Greek word *polis*, and in Latin it would be *civitas*. How to translate? “State” is impossible. If you say “the Greek city-states,” then you imply states, and you presuppose something¹⁴ [about] them which doesn’t exist in Aristotle. The literal translation would be “the city,” and that is the way in which I would always translate it; but at least it has the advantage that we cannot mistake it for what has been

^v *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9, 1181b2–23.

^{vi} Barker’s translation includes some phrases in brackets added to Aristotle’s text. The reader sometimes includes these bracketed additions by Barker; when he does so, we retain Barker’s brackets.

^{vii} Barker has “[Even so, and in spite of this detail].”

^{viii} Barker has “except fortuitously.”

commonly called the state in modern times. Now it is not too helpful, because when you hear the word city today, you think probably of Wall Street and Threadneedle Street^{ix} rather than of what Aristotle thought. So we need a preliminary explanation.

Now I would say what Aristotle has in mind is familiar to all of us, but not under the name of city. Its modern equivalent is the country, and it is very important that we speak of the country where Aristotle spoke of the city, and this has presumably something to do with the feudal past of the modern Western nations, but at any rate the meaning, including the emotional meaning of city^x is better expressed by “the country” than by any other term. But this is still not sufficient. We have to consider not only the commonsense equivalent of *polis*—which as I said is the country—we have also to consider its academic equivalent. That is by no means the country, because there is no science in existence which gives the country as country—or am I mistaken? Which science should deal with it? I do not know. The academic equivalent was for quite some time society with a capital S, but this I think is no longer so important. The term which corresponds academically to what Aristotle means by *polis* is culture in the sense in which it is now used in American and European social science. We speak of the culture of Denmark, of Libya, or of any other country or subculture.¹⁵ I think we should keep this in mind, this question: What ingredients of the present-day meaning of culture are absent from the Aristotelian concept of the *polis*? One thing we can say from the very beginning: a crucial ingredient of culture in the present-day sense of the term is, I take it, science. Science as now practiced in this country would be an essential ingredient of American culture. When we speak of medieval culture, we would also name [. . .] life of the university. Of Greek culture, of course such institutions as Aristotle’s Lyceum and Plato’s Academy would be a major part of classical Greek culture.

Now what one can say safely, I think, is that science and the other purely intellectual pursuits do not form a part of the *polis* in Aristotle’s sense. This is beyond the *polis* [. . .] and this is perhaps the most important difference between the present-day meaning of culture, according to which science is an ingredient of culture, and the Aristotelian understanding of *polis*, according to which science is not political, does not belong to the *polis*, with all the infinite implications which this distinction has. Now I think I will stop my introductory remarks at this point and see whether there are any points which anyone among you might like to raise.

Student: Isn’t it the case that art, in the sense of craftsmanship and also in the sense of dramatic and poetic art, might assume the place that science today assumes in some respects?

LS: Yes. One can say the arts are (as is stated by Aristotle in the beginning of the *Ethics*; we haven’t read the whole passage) the arts are all subject to the political art as the most architectonic art, and therefore they belong to the *polis*. And Aristotle will say later in the *Politics* that no *polis* is possible without the arts. Now by arts he means primarily of course such things as carpentry, smithing, shoemaking and so forth. What we call the fine arts, and we include poetry, would also be arts. So clearly, say, dramatic arts would be a part of the *polis*, and that was in fact the case. The production of comedies and tragedies was [. . .] a public version of the city of Athens and of other cities. No question. But this means we think today that arts,

^{ix} A street in the City of London which is the address of the Bank of England.

^x That is, *polis*.

including poetry and science, belong somehow together. This seems to be implied in your question. Aristotle draws a line between them. One belongs rather to the side of the *polis* and [that is] the arts, the fine arts; and [the other], science and philosophy, does not. When in the fourteenth century an Aristotelian took up the questions raised in Aristotle's *Politics*—and since he was confronted with the fact that at that time high claims were raised by the priesthood, claims for which there was no support in Aristotle's *Politics*—he made this assertion. Among the many functions which must be fulfilled there is one to be fulfilled by the priests [. . .] but this man, called Marsilius, said: “the function of the priesthood is to teach.”^{xi} Every *polis*, every *civitas*, or every political society must have a teaching, group of teachers, and these teachers were the priests. So he could find a place for the priests, for the Christian priests, in his scheme. Aristotle never speaks of any teacher as part of the *polis*, and since science and teaching are obviously related to each other he takes it for granted, as you can see especially from the eighth book, that children will be taught reading, writing, and what they now call artistic appreciation. So there will be teaching, but somehow this is subordinate to the general function that the city has to educate, to form, to mold the future citizens. But it has nothing to do with any aesthetic [. . .] strictly modern, political. Science, which for Aristotle means theoretical science, is [in] an entirely different position. That is for Aristotle of the utmost importance, but it transcends the *polis*. Here you see a manifest difference between Aristotle and Plato, when Plato asserted the philosophers, that is to say the men of science as Plato meant them, should become kings. There is no equivalent to that in Aristotle. Now let us go along.

Student: Does Aristotle mean by science anything that transcends the *polis*?

LS: All right. I take the word science; of course the Greek equivalent would be *epistēmē*, as Aristotle means it.¹⁶ It is sometimes used in a loose sense, when it can mean any kind of knowledge, including the knowledge possessed by the shoemaker, but in the strict sense it is theoretical science and is above all of the universe, of the cosmos and of its parts. Men, living things, animals and flowers and so on, and astronomy,¹⁷ it's not misleading to call them a science. The notion today that this is a relatively recent thing—though some of you are not older than it happened, that science becomes of crucial military and therefore political importance so that the pursuit of science is one of the most important aims of the commonwealth, that is—Aristotle was at the opposite pole. This was prepared slowly for the modern century, and Aristotle is surely at the opposite pole. Science does not include the *polis*. And just as the forerunners of the universities, the foundations made by Plato and by Aristotle, their private institutions, which were permitted by the city,¹⁸ were not illegal foundations but they were surely not prompted by the city. On this question we may have much more to say while we go.

If there are no further points, then let us begin to read the *Politics* and just make a first acquaintance with that book. I suppose you all use Barker's translation. The Barker translation is very helpful when one begins to read Aristotle, because he explains in notes, in angular brackets, the sometimes very laconic, very concise [. . .] of Aristotle. But on the other hand, you don't get the proper impression of Aristotle's way of life, because Barker is almost garrulous whereas Aristotle is [. . .] Nevertheless it is a useful book, and I am recommending especially Barker's

^{xi} Cf. Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, trans. Alan Gewirth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 1.6.8, 23.

long introduction which shows his great common sense. Now let us begin.

Reader: Page 1. Article 1.

Observation shows us, first, that every polis is a species of association, and, secondly, that all associations are instituted for the purpose of attaining some good—for all men do all their acts with a view to achieving something which is, in their view, a good. We may therefore hold that all associations aim at some good; and we may also hold that the particular association which is the most sovereign of all, and includes all the rest, will pursue this aim most, and will thus be directed to the most sovereign of all goods. This most sovereign and inclusive association is the polis, as it is called, or the political association. (1252a1-6)

LS: Now we will stop here. Every society is a community; every *polis* is a community, and every community is established for the sake of some good. From this it follows that since all societies aim after some good, this will be done to the highest degree, and¹⁹ the most comprehensive goal will be the end of that society which is the most authoritative, most sovereign of all, and which comprises all of the society. That is the *polis*.

And now Aristotle engages in a piece of polemics against some other men, perhaps Plato is one of them, who deny that there was an essential difference between the *polis* and the other societies, in particular the household. They said a *polis* is different from a household only by size and not [in kind]. Aristotle rejects that and then he tries to show in what the difference between the two societies exists. Then he goes on to develop this theme. We will discuss this at greater length next time by starting from the most elementary society, the smallest society, and this is in the first place male and female association which is necessary for procreation. Then the second very elementary association is that between master and slave that exists according to Aristotle for the sake of not procreation, of course, but of salvation in the simple sense of the preservation of life, meaning this, as Aristotle will develop later: there are people who are bodily very strong but are so dumb that they cannot take care of themselves, and others who have common sense but do not have that strength. They are [. . .] each other beautifully. This is master-slave.

Now when we take these two associations together, we get the household. And this thing of husband and wife, and then of course the children, and master or mistress on one hand, and the slaves on the other; and then when the household branches out, say in a couple of generations [. . .] many more than the children, and then we will have a whole village. This village would then satisfy many needs which the household cannot meet. But the village still is not sufficient for satisfying all human needs, and therefore there is a larger, more comprehensive association consisting of many villages, transforming these villages into one larger unity, and that is the *polis*. On this *polis* there is a part which we perhaps should read in 1252b, Article 8, page 4.

Reader:

When we come to the final and perfect association, formed from a number of villages, we have already reached the polis—an association which may be said to have reached the height of full self-sufficiency; or rather we may say that while it grows for the sake of mere life and is so far, and at that stage, still short of full self-sufficiency, it exists for the sake of a good life and is

therefore fully self-sufficient. (1252b28-1253a1)

LS: In other words, the city comes into being for the sake of life; that is, men live in the woods and then, for the sake of defending themselves against enemies or wild beasts, form the city, and there is nothing in their minds or in their actions except the desire to live. But once they live together, then they see that the city can do more for them than merely protect their lives, that they are enabled by the city to lead a good life, and Aristotle expresses it by saying that the city comes into being for the sake of living, but it *is*, meaning it exists after its genesis has been completed, for the sake of living well. Yes . . .

Reader: Page 5, continuation of Article 8.

Because it is the completion of associations existing by nature, every polis exists by nature, having itself the same quality as the earlier associations from which it grew.

LS: So in other words, because the community consisting of husband and wife is natural, having the natural end of procreation, the same is true of the other associations mentioned before; from that it follows that the *polis* which seems to be most self-sufficient and not natural, the *polis* too is natural. It is the end toward which all earlier or more primitive associations point. Yes . . .

Reader: Page 5, continuation of Article 8.

It is the end or consummation to which those associations move, and the ‘nature’ of things consists in their end or consummation; for what each thing is when its growth is completed we call the nature of that thing, whether it be a man or a horse or a family. (1252b31-34)

LS: This is the [. . .] of what occurs here²⁰ when I spoke of the commonsense thinking interpreted, elucidated in Aristotle’s work. When a farmer says to a helper, “Bring me a horse,” and the boy brings a colt, he will say, “I told you to bring a horse.” A colt, being a young, immature horse is not truly a horse. Or if he would bring a decrepit mare, he would say, “Didn’t I tell you to bring me a horse?” That is not truly a horse; it’s a defective one. Or to take another example, when you go to a street and you can’t pass through because there are so many children around, probably in the neighborhood of a school, you will not say “I couldn’t get through because there were so many human beings around”; you will say “children.” Children are human beings, but not mature humans. And even if there were only women, you wouldn’t say “human beings,” you would say “women.” So our own usage confirms what Aristotle meant; so by the nature of a thing we mean the complete version of that, and the complete normal [. . .] Yes . . .

Reader: 1253a, Article 9.

Again [and this is a second reason for regarding the state as natural] the end, or final cause, is the best. Now self-sufficiency is the end, and so the best. (1252b34-1253a1)

LS: We can stop at this point. So the *polis* is natural. This will need several modifications, but this is surely the beginning of Aristotle’s doctrine and of the utmost importance. The city is natural. I think we do not get the full airing of this thesis if one does not consider the alternative. The most obvious alternative is of course that the city is an artifact: a machine, artificial. This view also existed prior to Aristotle, and he surely has this thing also in mind. But there was a

much more venerable view of the *polis*, and that is—for instance, when Homer speaks of Troy, he calls it the holy, sacred Troy. The city is holy. As some people have said in modern times, the *polis* was not merely the state but also the church. That is an approximation to the truth, but the split between state and church is wholly alien to the Greeks, and therefore it is only an apparent and not a true interpretation. When Aristotle says the city is natural, he means also it is not holy, and we'll see later on how important that is.

Before you began to read, we find an indication when Aristotle, in order to prove that originally²¹ the city is an outgrowth of villages, and villages are outgrowths of the family, Aristotle uses the proof that in the origin, in the olden times, the cities were ruled by kings, because every household, every family, is ruled in a kingly manner by the oldest, by the father. You've heard this by the father [. . .] with more than one father, say, the brothers, and then the eldest brother would then rule. And this is what Homer says. Then after the quote from Homer . . .

Reader: 1252b, Article 7, page 4.

Each of them ruleth/Over his children and wives
a passage which shows that they lived in scattered groups, as indeed men generally did in ancient times. The fact that men generally were governed by kings in ancient times, and that some still continue to be governed in that way, is the reason that leads us all to assert that the gods are also governed by a king. We make the lives of the gods in the likeness of our own—as we also make their shapes— (1252b24-29)

LS: [. . .] human beings do that [. . .] Now I think it is quite clear that Aristotle does not belong to those who do that, and this is the view which most men have, “all” in the loose sense of the word all, and Aristotle exactly does not share this, and therefore the *polis* is not holy, cannot be holy. All men say that the gods are ruled by a king. Aristotle says this also in his way, which differs so much from the popular because his god is not like a Zeus. And the other point, that men understand by gods being[s] similar to themselves and beings whose life is similar to human life, this is what he rejects, and that is the ultimate reason why the *polis* cannot be holy for him but is natural.

Now since the *polis* is natural, it follows as Aristotle makes clear in his sequel that man is himself by nature a political animal. Sometimes people say that one is not civil, but social. The distinction does not exist for Aristotle; it's the same. A man is a political animal, and the proof of that is that which is peculiar to man, reason and speech, points to the *polis*. Let us turn to 1253a, the top of page 7.

Reader:

There is therefore an immanent impulse in all men towards an association of this order. But the man who first *constructed* such an association was none the less the greatest of benefactors.

LS: You see there is a man who constructed or founded the city, and all cities are founded by men. This does not in any way contradict the natural character of the *polis*. These founders of cities simply fulfill a demand of man's nature, execute the will of nature, and therefore man is by

nature a political animal. Yes . . .

Reader: 1253a, continuation of top of page 7.

Man, when perfected, is the best of animals; but if he be isolated from law and justice he is the worst of all. Article 16. Injustice is all the graver when it is armed injustice; and man is furnished from birth with arms [such as, for instance, language] which are intended to serve the purposes of moral prudence and virtue, but which may be used in preference for opposite ends. That is why, if he be without virtue, he is a most unholy and savage being, and worse than all others in the indulgence of lust and gluttony. Justice belongs to the polis; for justice, which is the determination of what is just, is an ordering of the political association. (1253a31-40)

LS: So in other words, there cannot be justice outside of the *polis*. Justice is something political. Now what does this mean? Does this mean it is a kind of Hobbean state of nature in which the practice of justice is altogether impossible if men have not entered civil society? No, that is not Aristotle's [. . .] But the justice which is possible without a city can only be very imperfect;²² the difference between justice and injustice is not unqualifiedly dependent on the *polis*, but only within the *polis* is the full flowering of justice possible. The reason which Aristotle gives here is this: Justice is political, connected or depending on the *polis*, for the judicial decision which tells us what is just or unjust in criminal cases is an arrangement of the political community and justice is the decision of what is just in a given case.

We have to consider more carefully this introductory section which ends at this point and which serves to prove that the *polis* is natural, and therefore man by nature is a political animal. And then, after having given this proof, Aristotle turns to the parts of the *polis*, and by these parts of the *polis* he understands here in the first book the association of which the *polis* consists, not the individuals. This consideration where the parts of the *polis* are meant to be individuals comes only in book 3. But here he speaks only of the associations, and the most important subject, because it is the most controversial subject in Aristotle's time, is the association of master and slave; and therefore this takes up a considerable part of the first book. And then, since association [. . .] and preserved in the city is the family or the household, the whole question of household management—or in Greek, of *oikonomia*, economics—comes up also in the first book. This we will discuss in the next and in the following meeting. Now is there any other point you would like to bring up?

Student: In 1253a Aristotle begins to demonstrate that the *polis* is prior to the individual. I wonder whether—

LS: Yes, that is a very important point. Could you read?

Reader: Page 6. Paragraph 2.

We may now proceed to add that the polis is prior in the order of nature to the family and the individual. The reason for this is that the whole is necessarily prior to the part. If the whole body be destroyed, there will not be a foot or a hand, except in that ambiguous sense in which one uses the same word to indicate a different thing, as when one speaks of a

‘hand’ made of stone; for a hand, when destroyed [by the destruction of the whole body], will be no better than a stone ‘hand.’ All things derive their essential character from their function and their capacity; and it follows that if they are no longer fit to discharge their function, we ought not to say that they are still the same things, but only that, by an ambiguity, they still have the same names. (1253a19-25)

LS: So I think that the thesis which is so hard to swallow is that the *polis* is by nature prior to the individual. That is of course diametrically opposed to the doctrines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—Hobbes, Locke, and so on—that the individuals are first, and then they join in order to make the social contract and thus found civil society. Therefore there are natural rights of men for the securing of which, safeguarding of which the *polis* is founded. The *polis* cannot interfere with these rights, because they are prior to the *polis*. Aristotle denies that by implication [. . .] Aristotle tries to explain it by example. Without the whole to which it belongs, no thing can be what it claims to be. A hand cut off is no longer a hand. It looks like a hand, but it can no longer do the work of a hand. If it is unable to do that work, it is not a hand strictly speaking. But only a hand, as he translated it—there is the name only in common and nothing more than the name. A stone hand made by a sculptor is as much a hand as a hand cut off. Now if man is by nature a political animal, then man cut off from the *polis* is as little a human being as that cut-off hand, because he is unable to do the work of man, to lead a human life except when—and Aristotle makes some minor qualifications—when someone might by accident not live in a *polis*, that of course does not affect his humanity. But if he is in himself, independent of any accidents, not able to live in the city, then he is a subhuman being; and then he makes [clear] in addition: or more than a human being. This also exists. He also has in mind not saints who live like hermits but people like himself, philosophers. This is the background of this whole work hardly mentioned, that the highest human life transcends the city. We must never forget that, and there will be occasions when it comes out explicitly; but ordinarily speaking, political science as Aristotle understands it, political life had to do with the characteristic human life, the life of most men. The few who devote themselves to understanding are a special case.

Student: The question, at least in this introduction, seems to hinge on the question of self-sufficiency, and I wonder whether one could maintain that one could be self-sufficient. I mean Aristotle would have maintained it, but whether one could maintain that one is self-sufficient without being a philosopher.

LS: You can maintain in fact anything, if one has the time. But Aristotle would say self-sufficiency does not depend merely on one’s opinion of self-sufficiency. Think of a moronic fellow who is perfectly “happy,” as we say. He may go around smiling, never complain, and is satisfied with his [. . .] Is this a self-sufficient man? Is this a happy man? Now I suggest as a free rendering of what Aristotle means by “happy” this explanation: contented and enviable. If a man is contented but on the basis of his very narrow horizons, he is not truly happy; but if he is contented so that men can be²³ [envious] of him, then he is happy. So apply this to self-sufficiency. If self-sufficiency is one which is not merely that the man who doesn’t know of anything, hasn’t heard of anything better, broader, deeper than he has ever experienced, he is not self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency means that he can satisfy all natural human desires according to their order of importance. So a man who can satisfy his natural desire for food in the most

perfect manner by being a glutton of the first order is not a self-sufficient human being. But he would not be self-sufficient if he did not have a reasonable amount of food. This belongs to the conditions, not to the true culture, the true purpose of his life: and that is indeed according to Aristotle the life of the mind. There is no use, and it would be²⁴ foolish and wicked to conceal that for one moment. Aristotle has a certain view of the order of the hierarchy of the ingredients of man, and only if these ingredients are satisfied in the proper proportion is a man in order, self-sufficient.

Student: Could I just ask that if the definition is contented and enviable, it seems to have within itself the seeds of its own destruction if it is the sort of thing that is so enviable that other people will try to take it from you.

LS: That is inevitable. Man is a mortal being. Just as everyone has the germs of destruction. What has come into being will perish again. That is all right, but the question is whether we can live out this life, or is [it] prematurely destroyed.

Session 2: October 4, 1967
Book 1, chapter 2

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —the question of slavery we will discuss at length due to the fact that there are many people in the world who know nothing of Aristotle except that he has defended slavery, so we must see precisely what Aristotle did in this section.

Now you made very clear, Mr. [. . .] one point which we have not brought out.ⁱ When Aristotle says the city is natural, he means in the first place it is not an artifact, like a shoe or a house; and in the second place he means it is not holy, although this is not explicitly stated. Now you have brought out another point, which is the most important: the *polis* does not rest essentially on violence. The natural as opposed to the violent. For example, a tree grows in a certain manner; then you may by violence change the direction of its growth. Or a stone has by nature a tendency to fall down, but by violence you may throw it into the air. The violent is that which is opposed to nature. Now applying this to the *polis*,¹ whatever we may think of this Aristotelian notion of nature willing and so on, to which Mr. [. . .] referred, is the proposition that the *polis* is not essentially based on violence makes for immediate sense. Do you know the alternate view would be [that] the root of the city is necessarily violence. Did you ever hear that view? Where do you find it?

Student: Machiavelli.

LS: Machiavelli, yes, and even more venerable than Machiavelli . . .

Student: Hobbes.

LS: No. Hobbes would not be more venerable. [Laughter] Because he wrote English and not Italian? [Laughter]

Student: The descendants of Cain.

LS: It's true. In a way the [. . .] that Cain was the first founder of the city—and that meant the first murderer—the first founder of the city, and that is what Machiavelli reasserts, not on the basis of the Bible but on the basis of the Roman story that the founder of Rome was a fratricide, just as Cain. So Aristotle denies that. He would, as we shall later see, be alive to the presence of violence in political life, but he asserts the *polis* is not essentially based on violence. When he speaks of this in such a circumstantial way, about how the *polis* could have grown out of earlier associations—out of the family, and the family grows into a village, and then some villages settle together peacefully and become a *polis*—that's possible, and therefore there is no essential necessity of violence. In fact, things are a bit more complicated, as Aristotle knew and I think we also know, and Aristotle makes ample allowance for it. But the starting point of the city in [the] *Politics* is surely this assertion.

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

Now I mentioned last time we must engage in some very general [. . .] Aristotle says that the *polis* is prior to the individual, opposing the view so famous in modern times that the individual is prior to the civil society. Now in this modern development, represented above all by men like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, where the individual precedes the society, the individual is complete, complete without civil society, as is shown by the fact that the individual is able to make a contract by which civil societies are established, which is an act of an actually rational being, not only potentially rational being. In this modern doctrine, the emphasis is and the [. . .] consequence is the emphasis on the rights of man, to use the formula which was coined only later in the eighteenth century but which was implied already in Hobbes and Locke. Hence we must conclude that the opposite is true of Aristotle. In Aristotle, there is a primacy not of rights but of duties. Man owes his humanity, apart from nature, to his being brought up in a civilized civil society; and therefore his fundamental posture is one of gratitude and not of rebellion. The opposite is the tendency of the modern doctrines.

In this connection one could raise this question. The doctrines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in particular the view stated at the beginning of the Declaration of Independence, is now generally regarded as ridiculous, and not only by reactionaries but even by the most progressive people. But still we hear a lot of talk about rights, human rights they are now called; they are no longer called [natural rights]. If this view that man is complete prior to entering society is absurd as everybody today says or implies, what is the basis of the present-day demand for human rights rather than concern with duties? It is a hard question, because all these men admit of course that society, only true society has men [. . .] even of thinking of that, and the primary point would seem to be an obligation to society which made them human beings, at least in the fuller sense of the word than they are by nature.

What then is the basis of the primacy of rights, the theoretical basis of the primacy of rights in present-day political practice? I throw this out as a question. I do not expect that we can answer this now, but I would like to give one little instance. If we take communism, which by definition of course asserts that man is radically social—and therefore Aristotle is right over against Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau—and discredits these doctrines as theories of capitalism, early capitalism, as you may know: now how does a Marxist present the demands which they regard as required² for the sake of humanity, disregarding all secondary things regarding their tactics, practices, and so forth, that is take the best case? It is essential for Marxism to assert, although this doesn't come up very much in practical discussion, that the condition from which man started, preceding capitalism and feudalism and all other nasty things, is original communism, just as the division of labor which makes our present life so debased according to the Marxist [. . .] was preceded by an original absence of the division of labor. So we have an original man of whom we know very little scientifically, but somehow we have to believe that [there was] an original man who lived in communities without divisions of labor—except the unfortunate division of labor between males and females regarding, as Marx puts it, the sexual act, as we would perhaps say regarding procreation, but this cannot be helped. It is one of these awkward things. But what is the meaning of this point, this whole kind of thing? Well, because Marx still feels the need of [. . .] the naturalness of his objective, the classless society where there is no longer any division of labor to speak of. Just as in a way Rousseau did the same, and he follows here Rousseau quite [. . .] by asserting man is good by nature, which has a long and complicated

implication in Rousseau, but even the literal meaning is important. How can we expect man ever to become good, meaning peaceable, nonaggressive and so on and so on, if his goodness as distinguished from the nasty qualities were not the ones which were emphatically natural? So in other words, what I suspect is behind the present-day discussions which are based on the rejection of any natural right and any state of nature [is that] the notion of nature is still living on in a submerged way.

Another point which we must also consider: how Aristotle's thesis of the natural character of the *polis* leads to the consequence that man is by nature a political animal. Now this fact³ has an immediate, a direct reason in the fact that man is the only beast—only animal, I should probably say—which possesses speech as distinguished from sounds. Many animals give sounds, but man alone has speech, articulate speech. Because that is man's essence, to use [. . .] translation of an Aristotelian term, and there is an essence of man distinguishing [him] from all other beasts, more generally stated the whole, the universe consists of kinds of things which differ essentially from each other and not merely in bulk or quantitatively. And the doctrine of this essence also implies according to Aristotle the following point. Aristotle makes the distinction clear by speaking of artifacts first. He doesn't do it in this work but in his *Physics*, but I think I should mention it. If you take a shoe, and you see that there are four kinds of questions which must be addressed to it, four ways in which you address to the shoe the question *why*. Why is that thing? And in the first place, you will say: Well, because it is made of leather, or wood, whatever it may be. This Aristotle calls the matter, the out of which. Secondly, there must have been someone who made it: the shoemaker. Aristotle calls this the efficient cause. And then there is a third *why* the shoe is as it is, because neither the leather nor the shoemaker account as such for the fact that it has this particular shape resembling somehow the human foot. This is the form, he calls it, or the essence. Then finally, neither the shoemaker, nor the matter, nor the efficient cause would do or would bring about what they bring about if it were not for some purpose, and that is the fourth kind of cause, called the final cause or the end. And this in the case of the shoe is, I suppose, the protection of our feet against stones and other things which could harm our feet. These four kinds of causes are the [. . .] for all understanding. In the case of natural things, however, as distinguished from artifacts, the essence or form and the end⁴ [coincide]. For instance, a louse has no purpose other than to be a louse, or if this is too low a creature for you, take a lion, or take a human being. The purpose of man is to be a man, of course to be a complete man, not a sick man or in other ways defective. The same applies to the louse, only in the case of man completeness and perfection is richer, more sophisticated than in the case of the brute animals.

In order to understand this a bit better, let us have a look at the modern Aristotelians, the classics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially Hobbes and Locke. What do they do with this Aristotelian scheme? Well, I suppose you know this from your general civilization courses, as this is a very obvious fact. What happens to the causes? Well, the final causes are out. Of course, in artifacts they are still maintained, but no natural things have any.⁵ Therefore there are no longer any formal causes in the Aristotelian sense, because the form is the end of the development. Take a cat. The embryo cat, or the kitten, tends towards becoming full-grown cats. That is a teleological tendency. It is a well-known fact that you cannot possibly understand the embryo of any being if you do not know the full-grown being. The completed thing which is in accordance with the form is the key to all [. . .] At any rate, this becomes, with a simple rejection of the end and therefore

also with the form as the end of the development, the question of the essence of man. What distinguishes man from all other beings becomes obscured, and in a way it still maintains the old definition of man as a rational animal but it has no longer that illuminating meaning it has for Aristotle. For Aristotle, for example, it would be—if that is a true definition of man, a true determination of the essence of man—that he is a rational animal. The other peculiarities of man, that men weep and laugh, that men have hands, his upright posture and so on, they all would have to be understood as necessary for his rationality. Only a rational being, that is what Aristotle implies, can have a hand as distinguished from paws, can weep and laugh—and not this apparent laughing which⁶ friends of dogs attribute especially to puppies, which is a very touching thought and not tenable, unfortunately.

Now what happens instead? So there is no longer a clear concern with the essential difference between man and brutes. What is the practical meaning, the practical consequence of that? Very generally, how do we try to understand man? Modern science as well as Aristotle are so different, but what is the general procedure? Schematically stated, and which means [. . .] stated, it is as follows. We must understand man in the light of what is not—man, meaning biologically.

Psychology must ultimately be based on biology, and the biology must ultimately be traced, via biochemistry and so on, to chemistry and physics through the inanimate. Generally speaking, it is necessary to understand the higher in the light of the lower, and that is true up to the present day and has all kinds of consequences also within political science, as we will see from time to time; whereas for Aristotle this can never be the case. That which is essentially different must be understood in its own terms and not by reducing it to something else which it is not, which is essentially different.

Now another point which I would like to mention in this connection. [In the case of man], there are not ends⁷ by which we must take our bearings in understanding human life, and in particular political [life], but we must start rather from the efficient cause. And the efficient cause[s] here in the field of moral and political things are desires, and one can say that the great trick of men like Hobbes is the identification of a distinguished desire with the fundamental right of man. In Hobbes's case the distinguished desire is rather an aversion, the fear of violent death, and the fundamental right is the right of preservation. Here we have a coincidence of the strongest [. . .] with the fundamental right, that is to say the fundamental moral, political phenomenon. This, by the way, reveals the motive of this change in orientation. If you build on the most powerful passion, you build on safe foundations, whereas if you build on and start from and take your bearings by the highest perfection of man, for which most men don't give a damn, you build on very unsolid foundations. So a peculiar "realism" is underlying this modern political thought: first of all, of this classic bit of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in more complicated versions also later on.

Now this is very well. So Hobbes believes, and his successors too believe⁸ [that they are] able to found a new and more realistic political science or political philosophy by taking their starting point from the strongest action which as such is identical with the fundamental right or the fundamental moral political phenomenon, and that is the desire of self-preservation. But what is the status of this desire? It is to be the foundation of the rights of man, let me say. What is human about the desire for self-preservation? The desire of self-preservation is shared by men with all living beasts, surely

with all animals. According to a wider interpretation that given by Spinoza, the principle of self-preservation is even identical with the general law of inertia which determines all beings. So we have this strange fact, then, that the fundamental moral political phenomenon is not specifically human, whereas in the earlier political philosophy it was of course specifically human. We have seen in Aristotle the fact of speech or reason. Naturally reason comes in in Hobbes and his successors too, but in a roundabout way. Man's essence is not considered in establishing the foundation of morals and politics. It comes in in this way: civil society emerges through contract, according to this kind of doctrine, and contract of course is an act of reason. Therefore only men can make contracts, and therefore beasts are excluded from the benefits of civil society. But it is only this afterthought as it were which leads to the rationality of the project and not the foundation itself.

Now this much regarding the background of the whole question. We will have to return to that from time to time, but we will leave it at this for the time being. I only wanted to read to you one passage, this man is a rational animal, to quote the crudified, simplified, and traditional version of the Aristotelian understanding of man. Man is a rational animal.

Now I read to you another definition. That is from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*: "Man is a rope tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across, a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking-back, a dangerous shuddering and stopping."ⁱⁱ Now if you were to choose between Aristotle's definition and Nietzsche's definition, I suspect quite a few of you would say Nietzsche's is better because it⁹ brings out much more of the life of men, of the inner problem of man than Aristotle's and the [. . .] definition does. What would Aristotle, or a man who has learned something from Aristotle, say in defense of that old master? "Man is a rope over an abyss" and so on and so on. "Man is a rational animal." Yes . . .

Student: Perhaps that's the other side of the abyss, and it would be less likely to induce a panic fall in the abyss [. . .] we would keep our eye on the goal.

LS: Yes, that is implied, but more simple and more obvious. What is a rope? A rope? [Laughter] An artifact. You may put laundry on it, I suppose. You may also walk on ropes if you are very able. But in a word, that is a metaphor, Aristotle would say; I want to have nonmetaphoric statements. The metaphoric statements are quite helpful for many purposes, but they are not that which the philosopher or scientist is after, number one; and number two, passing the metaphoric act of Nietzsche's statement by what else? In this statement there occurs one point: a dangerous on-the-way, a dangerous looking back. A rope doesn't look back, does it? I think generally speaking some birds may walk a tightrope, but generally speaking only certain kinds of men can do it. And if we say: All right, in the metaphoric sense, that is what man as man does; most people are too lazy and too dumb to understand this true situation but that is the true situation of man. Looking back, understanding is always implied, is it not? In Nietzsche's definition itself, man could not be that "rope" without possessing understanding in a way in which the beasts do not possess understanding. That is what Aristotle means by calling man the rational animal. So the definition is not simply refuted by the fact that it is not as

ⁱⁱ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), 126 (Prologue, 4).

suggestive for quite a few purposes as Nietzsche's remark is.

Let us begin in our discussion of the first book at the point where we left off, paragraph [12]53b.

Reader:

And now that it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management, for every state is composed of households. (1253b1-3)

LS: Yes. Every state. All right. But¹⁰ there is a part or a smaller community between the household and the city. Do you remember it?

Student: The village.

LS: The village. Why does he skip the village here? Is it not this orderly procedure? In reading Aristotle one must always use one's head. Now we are speaking of the *polis*, and we look at the *polis* or its modern equivalents, and then we always see within the *polis* households. We do not necessarily see within the *polis* villages, even if there are still villages noticeable, as in some big¹¹ [cities] there are—Greenwich Village, but more visibly in old cities like Paris and London. The villages in the serious sense are then only preserved as administrative units which owe their existence to the *polis*; they are no longer villages of their own right. Households or families still are subsisting associations.

Now a bit later, in line 14 or thereabouts, Aristotle speaks about the parts and that we know already. There is a threefold association within the household: the husband-wife, the father-children, the master-slave. Let us now speak first about master and slave.

Reader: Page 9.

Partly [for reasons of utility] in order to gather lessons bearing on the necessities of practical life, and partly in order to recover whether we can attain any view, superior to those now generally held, which is likely to promote a scientific knowledge of the subject—

LS: Let us stop there. You see a twofold purpose which Aristotle always pursues throughout the [*Politics*],ⁱⁱⁱ although he does not always say it. First, it may be useful for necessary purposes, but he is also concerned with reaching the purely theoretical understanding of the phenomena for its own sake. Go on then.

Reader:

For some thinkers hold the function of the master to be a definite science, and moreover think that household management, mastership, statesmanship, and monarchy are the same thing, as we said at the beginning of the treatise; others however maintain that for one man to be another man's master is contrary to nature, because it is only convention that makes the one a slave and the other a free man, and there is no difference between them by nature, and that therefore it is

ⁱⁱⁱ Strauss says "*Ethics*" but clearly means the *Politics*.

unjust for it is based on force.^{iv} (1253b17-23)

LS: Let us stop here for a moment. Here he indicates the subject which he must discuss, which he has not in the case of husband and wife and parent-children, namely, that the whole relationship, as we would say today, is immoral. This objection is raised only in the case of slavery. Aristotle says it is, as people say, unjust because it is based only on violence, and on other terms they are only slaves through convention, through human establishment and not by nature. The alternative view is there is a science or art of ruling as a master and that this art is fundamentally the same as that of ruling as a king or as a statesman. And from this point of view, of course being a master would be a grand thing: [it] would be the same as being a king, only on a smaller scale, but in essence it would be the same. What Aristotle implies here in this statement is there cannot be a science of things that are against nature. This throws back some further light on his notion of nature. Now why should this not be? [. . .] Could there not be a science of natural monstrosities, pigs with two heads and human beings with four or six or seven fingers, as might have been observed in Aristotle's time or since? Why could there not be—and let us assume that slavery is against nature, and could there not be a science of slavery, of the various kinds of slavery? Have you ever heard such a proposition or read that there cannot be sciences or arts of that which is not in accordance with nature? Some of you have. Is Mr. [. . .] here? Oh, here. You have read the [*Gorgias*], as you told me a short while ago. Well, there the question comes up whether rhetoric is an art; and it is denied that it is an art, and it is compared to other things such as cosmetics, for instance. Why shouldn't cosmetics be an art, just as medicine is an art? And the answer given there: cosmetics produces the mere appearance of health or youth—mere sham, nothing genuine, nothing substantial, nothing natural—and therefore it may consist of quite clever tricks, but it is not an art.^v This is fundamentally the same as that which Aristotle means here. Something which does not have a foundation in the true needs of man can at best be an amusing pastime but can never be a genuine art.

But we must not forget another point which Aristotle seems to imply. There cannot be a science of things which are merely by convention—that is to say, which have no inner necessity. For example, coins: they are coined from very different material in very different shapes with very different circumscriptions and so on, and yet this is not something serious. The same would apply to weights and measures, in spite of their practical importance, but that is not something which has an inner necessity; and above all it would apply to languages, if it is true that according to Aristotle languages are fundamentally convention[al]. I mention this only in passing. Yes . . .

Student: I really don't understand the meaning of those statements about the impossibility of science of that which is not based upon or has its foundation upon natural needs of man.

LS: The alternative to what is natural is—there is the first alternative of artifacts. Of them, within limits this is possible, as Aristotle will say later in the first book. But we are speaking now not of the artifacts as artifacts—shoes, house, and so on—but of things which are only by virtue of

^{iv} The student here switches to reading from the Rackham translation of the *Politics* instead of the Barker translation, for reasons that are not indicated in the transcript. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944).

^v Plato, *Gorgias* 465b–c.

convention. What is an artifact fulfills a function and is self-subsistent. What is by convention is strictly speaking only by being held by human beings [. . .] Merely because men agreed upon it, it is accepted, and that as such is not a subject of a serious study. Let me use this somewhat more colloquially. Serious men would not be concerned with,¹² say, a simple example: stamp collecting. There are as you know many people who devote much time and money to stamp collecting. It can be quite interesting, especially for children, because it gives them some incentive toward geographical studies. But a man who finds the fulfillment of his life in stamp collecting is [. . .] witted. But we can with a great sense of humor find him charming, but off, by all means off. Wouldn't you agree?

Same Student: In other words, the statement that Aristotle makes is an evaluation of the value of this sort of work, and I don't think it is proven; it is merely an assertion. In other words, one might say that a knowledge of stamps helps one in a knowledge of other things, for instance the nature of communication, or the value placed upon art in society, what types of stamps are produced.

LS: Perhaps I once asserted without sufficient study that the beauty of stamps increases with the bankruptcy of the country. [Laughter] And the most solid country that ever was, Victorian England, had for fifty years the same dull stamp of Queen Victoria; and I saw quite a few other states, especially new states, who changed the stamps very frequently. Don't assert this to be a law, but I only wanted to show that—

Same Student: But that is an interesting finding, and not merely a matter of wit. In other words, you found something about the relationship of the stamp and the nature of the society.

LS: All right. But remind me of what you said about the value judgment. I'll come back to that. But for the time being, let us state it very straight. Whereas for Aristotle and such people there are things which are merely conventional, we think that a closer study will always show a necessity behind it [. . .] For example, stamps or the culture of kindergarten children can be as revealing of the product of a society as the conduct of its parliaments or armies. But let us think it through. I mean, there are certain things which all societies have: they must have communication, they must have some kind of government, they must have means of earning their livelihood, and so on. But there is something which gives the society its character, its peculiar character, and this is what people now call their values. Where do their values come from? Now according to an older notion, the values are simply an outcome, say, of the climate, the other geographic conditions, and perhaps also the economic conditions. But then more recent anthropologists began to doubt it. I remember I read a book by Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, in which she spoke especially of two North American Indian tribes who lived under exactly the same climactic and other conditions, and also racially no difference to speak of, but the one praised war highly and the other was a great lover of peace.^{vi} Could we explain it? It was there. Now if she had understood a bit better the background of the whole question, then she would have said this was a kind of decision which can no longer be explained of tribe A in favor of value alpha, and tribe B in favor of value beta. That is no longer explicable. That is what Aristotle means.

^{vi} Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).

What the distinction means is that there are things in society where people do something like tossing coins because a rational preference is not possible from the nature of the case, and these are as such no longer of interest—of course, very interesting for the people living under these things, but¹³ there is no need to find out any more, except we can perhaps get a typology in value systems and can arrange them. But that's all.

But the other point which you mentioned, that Aristotle makes a value judgment. Of course he makes a value judgment. All the time.

Same Student: I was misunderstood. What I was saying was that the nature of the statement itself—it is not possible to have a science of that which is not based upon natural . . . whether it's possible to have a science of uninteresting things is problematic. I don't find biology very interesting, and yet it is a science.

LS: That is not sufficient proof. There were times when people could have said alchemy is a science. I mean, the fact that it is generally regarded as a science does not prove that it is a science. But I believe it is possible to understand why biology must be a science, regardless of the defects which it may have now, because living beings are. We ourselves are living beings, and that is a very important piece of study. Whether I myself—perhaps I do not want to do the dirty work myself in laboratories, and that may be sufficient reason for me not to become a biologist; or I may be a very poor experimenter, and that may be a good reason for me not to become a biologist [. . .] in itself is an important science [. . .] but the science of stamps. I wonder whether there is a professorship for stamp knowledge established at any university, which is not necessarily a proof that there shouldn't be, but it would be a sign that in this respect I am in the mainstream of American thought.
[Laughter]

Now let us consider a few other passages a few lines later. “So the possession is an instrument toward living.” Do you have that? “And the property of a man is a multitude of instruments.”^{vii} This statement he must make in order to explain what is slavery. A slave is an¹⁴ [animate] possession. Now he makes here this distinction between the arts and living. The arts, all arts, produce something. Poetry produces poems. Even the legislative art can be said to produce laws. But life, living, does not consist in producing, in making; it consists in acting or doing. This is a crucial distinction which will be taken up more fully in book 7 but which we must consider already here; and the slave as Aristotle understands him is an instrument not for production, like a slave in agriculture or in industry, but a slave who enables a master and helps him towards living in the house. For example, shining his shoes, by shaving him, getting for him other necessities, but not for production of something. In this connection he says—

Reader: Page 10, Article 3.

This condition would be that each instrument could do its own work, at the word of command or by intelligent anticipation, like the statues of Daedalus or the tripods made by Hephaestus, of which Homer relates that ‘of their own motion they entered the conclave of Gods on Olympus,’ as if a shuttle should weave of itself, and a plectrum should do its own harp-playing.

Article 4. “The instruments of which we have just been speaking are instruments of *production*—

^{vii} Strauss's translation of 1253b30–32.

”viii (1253b34-1254a2)

LS: So then we would not need architects, nor would the masters need slaves. So what Aristotle here suggests [is] in the form of an important condition contrary to the fact. If there would be universal automatism, then there would be no need for servants or slaves. This is mentioned by Aristotle only as an unreal thing in order to throw light on what truly is. But for us this has become now a serious problem, the question of universal automatism, which of course has not yet been reached, not by a long shot, but which is there somehow in the background and a radical change in human life perhaps incomparable to any change ever achieved before, where human labor would no longer be necessary because there would be automatons who would do all the labor. For Aristotle that is a negative assumption, a negative one and a tacit one, of his whole doctrine. That such a state of affairs is absolutely impossible, that there will always be a necessity for work, hard work, and therefore for whole classes of society who have no leisure proper, that will come out later on. Now a little bit later, in 1254a, ¹⁵[line] 13, when he sums up what is the nature of the slave.

Reader:

These considerations therefore make clear the nature of the slave and his essential quality: one who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave, and a person is a human being belonging to another if being a man he is an article of property, and an article of property is an instrument for action separable from its owner—^{ix} (1254a13-18)

LS: Separable—not like the hand, for example, which is not separable. Go on.

Reader:

But we must next consider whether or not anyone exists who is by nature of this character, and whether it is advantageous and just for anyone to be a slave, or whether on the contrary all slavery is against nature.

LS: Now let us here consider Aristotle’s position. He had first shown what he says is the nature of the slave, and what his faculty, his function is. And then he raises the question: Is there any such slave? The question whether there are natural slaves is discussed after the natural slave has been defined. Now, therefore, here nature must be used in a somewhat different meaning, because it is not yet certain whether there are such things as natural slaves. One can speak for example also of the nature of artifacts. Aristotle, in his [*Poetics*],^x speaks of tragedy having reached at a certain point its nature, having become complete tragedy. Now in this wide sense, one can say even of non-natural things that they have nature. This is what this usage implies. Now go on.

Reader:

And it is not difficult either to discern the answer by theory or to discern it empirically.

^{viii} Barker’s translation.

^{ix} Rackham translation. Unless otherwise noted, all of the readings for the remainder of the course will be from the Rackham translation.

^x Strauss evidently misspeaks and says “*Ethics*.” See *Poetics* 1449a.

Authority and subordination are conditions not only inevitable but also expedient; in some cases things are marked out from the moment of birth to rule or to be ruled. And there are many varieties, both of rulers and of subjects (and the higher the type or the subject, the loftier is the nature of the authority exercised over them, for example, to control the human being is a higher thing than to tame a wild beast; for the higher the type of the parties to the performance of a function, the higher is the function, and when one party rules and another is ruled, there is a function performed between them)—because in every complete thing, where a plurality of parts, whether continuous or discrete, is combined to make a single common whole, there is always found a ruling and a subject factor, and this characteristic of living things is present in them as an outcome of the whole of nature, since even in things that do not partake of life there is a ruling principle, as in the case of a musical scale. (1254a20-33)

LS: Now let us wait here one second. Now what Aristotle says here is this: that order—and that means for Aristotle always subordination and supraordination—is a universal natural phenomenon; and this is not only necessary so that there be natural things but is also good, useful. No multitude can ever unite without a distinction of rulers and ruled, and that means not only no human multitude but any multitude. Even a multitude of atoms, if there were such a thing, according to Aristotle could not unite without some hierarchy, and there would be some atom or combination of atoms as the ruling ingredient. In other words [. . .] the absence of rule is altogether impossible. I mention atomism not by accident. There is a doctrine which was developed long before Aristotle's time, and he knew it of course, and here we have a notion which excludes hierarchy in any form; and therefore the doctrines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were frequently called by their opponents atomistic doctrines. They treated human individuals equal[ly] in a way that there could be no order, no government established through them or above them.

Nature as a whole is hierarchical in order, and therefore human government fits into that whole naturally. When he mentions in passing, to rule over better things, a better rule [. . .] also a value judgment, still recognized by many [. . .] common sense. When they say¹⁶ [of] someone running for elective office [that] he couldn't get himself elected dogcatcher, they imply that to rule dogs—a dogcatcher rules dogs—is less than to rule human beings. Whether it is true is another matter, but it is surely not something which should surprise us. Now we must skip quite a bit, to 1254b.

Reader:

Again the same holds good between man and the other animals: tame animals are superior in their nature to wild animals, yet for all the former it is advantageous to be ruled by man, since this gives them security. (1254b9-12)

LS: Now is this not one of these disgraceful statements of Aristotle, which seems to imply that poor domesticated dogs are superior to such a magnificent creature like a panther, a tiger, a lion? Is this not absurd? Now what does Aristotle mean by this? [. . .] no sense of the beauty of these [. . .] creatures. Or was he sufficiently close to nature to have a healthier respect for that dangerous character? What was it? What Aristotle has in mind is this: a ruled animal living with man in this way participates in reason—in a very poor way, because he doesn't have reason

proper, but in a way he does. From the point of view of a wild dog or any other wild animal, to be housebroken may not be a virtue—you know they wouldn't care to be housebroken—but in fact the housebroken dog complies with certain principles of decency, of propriety which he cannot as such appreciate. He's not allowed to think, but he complies in fact. Therefore, they are [. . .] So in other words Aristotle is wholly unromantic, wholly unromantic. Yes?

Student: Could one imply that he could make the inference in fact that man who [. . .] to be masters, does [a] man who has a weak soul [a] favor by taking him into his household and protecting him because he, being the equivalent of the tame animal—

LS: Now wait . . . if he is born for better things, you do an injustice to him. Aristotle does not mean that we should coddle one another. If someone for some reason wishes to get rid of all responsibility and only be fed and clothed and housed conveniently, and is a rather despicable [. . .] we would say, and one should not tolerate it if he can do better things. He could do other things. If he can't do anything with his life, as he thinks, then his betters should teach him.

Now from this subject which we just read, Aristotle turns rather soon to the people who are by nature slaves. What are they? Let us continue where we left off.

Reader:

Also, as between the sexes, the male is by nature—

LS: No, no, no . . . [Laughter] Oh, yes, I'm sorry. We do not wish to prevent the discussion of this delicate subject.

Reader:

superior and the female inferior, the male ruler and the female subject. And the same must also necessarily apply in the case of mankind generally; therefore all men that differ as widely as the soul does from the body and the human being from the lower animal (and this is the condition of those whose function is the use of the body and from whom this is the best that is forthcoming)—these are by nature slaves, for whom to be governed by this kind of authority is advantageous, inasmuch as it is advantageous to the subject things already mentioned. For he is by nature a slave who is capable of belonging to another (and that is why he does so belong), and who participates in reason so far as to apprehend it, but not to possess it— (1254b12-23)

LS: That is the crucial point of the definition of the natural slave. He participates in reason to the extent of apprehending it, which implies that a dog, even the brightest dog, does not apprehend reason. Now what is the proof of it? Aristotle is right on this point. You may train a dog as well as you can; he will not perceive the difference between your saying, "Bring me four pieces of wood" and "Bring me five pieces of wood," or even if you say—I don't speak of such high numbers as forty-four. The slave can hear the difference, can understand it. To that extent, he can perceive reason; he can perceive human discourse although he is unable to produce it in a significant way himself. And he adds here the other animals that obey not by perceiving reason but by feelings, meaning fear [. . .] but not understanding what is said. Now there is another point,

a difficulty which we shall discuss . . . Yes?

Student: I have a question. A slave who rebels and who does not understand his natural position and seethes behind taking orders, is he a slave anymore?

LS: It all depends. I mean, he may be a vicious beast, so to speak.

Same Student: But he may just see the system. [Laughter]

LS: For example, if he were able to argue fundamentally as Aristotle makes here some other people argue against slavery, then of course he would be a rational being and should not be a slave.

Same Student: [. . .] argument [. . .] a little bit better than his master.

LS: That is a point. The question is this. We cannot pursue that now; I will therefore, in order to prevent that some people either engender or preserve a prejudice already engendered against Aristotle, I would like to say one thing about the Aristotelian teaching on slavery. This will be the end of this meeting.

Aristotle asserts that only natural slaves may be rightfully enslaved, and the natural slave is a man who cannot guide his own mind because he is too dumb, and also [. . .] lacks self-control [. . .] I knew such a man once in my life in this country, in New York, and he was not a slave because such an institution has not been established in the state of New York for a long time, for a very long time. But he was in a state institution and could be loaned from there for very simple work, which he did; for example, he could paint a wall with the same color, so no faculty of discernment was required. So he could do that, but he was completely unable to control his desire for beer, and wherever he could find beer he drank it regardless of the quantity and then he could no longer work. So he needed a man or a body of men who protected him against himself. That was in this case the city of New York; it could in principle also have been [. . .]

Now we come to a serious point. If the natural slave is a fellow or like, say, [Caliban] in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, [very strong, or otherwise he could never be] [useful], an individual to whom you can say,¹⁷ "Now bring me four trunks of [. . .]: one, two, three, four," he could do that. But this usefulness would be very limited, and therefore when we come to book 7, when Aristotle takes up slavery as it is in practice, even from the best city you will see that these are men who are to be kept content with their condition by being promised emancipation. Now this is utterly impossible. In the case of natural slaves, they cannot possibly become emancipated. This is one of the most serious questions regarding Aristotle's *Politics*. One cannot, on the basis of having read this one page here, say Aristotle is a fascist, or whatever people say today—or a damned reactionary, which he was, in a way . . . [laughter] but this does not exhaust in any way the issue. So at this point we begin next time.

Session 3: October 9, 1967
Book 1, chapters 2–7

Leo Strauss: Now let me remind you of two points which came up last time and were not sufficiently discussed. The first is when Aristotle speaks of slavery; and also on other occasions he speaks of the twofold purpose of the discussion: of a practical one, you could say, and a theoretical one. Now this can and must be enlarged on the basis of what Aristotle says at the beginning of the *Ethics* on his purpose. Now the heroes of the *Ethics*, the proper heroes, are well-bred men: gentlemen, as one can say. It is a Greek word, *kalokagathia*. So in other words, these are people to whom Aristotle does not have to prove that one ought to live decently, because they know it from home, from their upbringing. So gentlemen as gentlemen are the heroes. And then of course there are also people of another kind, and they are the purely theoretical men, let us say for simplicity's sake the philosophers. Now whether the philosophers are by definition gentlemen or not is one of the most difficult questions. We must see what we can learn about that. But surely the philosopher as philosopher has a concern, namely, a concern with understanding which the gentlemen as gentlemen do not have. The same duality or duplicity of course is also to be expected regarding the audience of the *Politics*.

Now the second point which must have struck all of you, either because you have already read Aristotle, and maybe more forcefully if you have never read Aristotle before; that is his speaking of nature, when he speaks: the *polis* is natural, and man is by nature a political animal, and there are men who are slaves by nature and others who are free men by nature. Now what does he mean there by nature? In our century, there is a thing in the world which calls itself naturalism, and I suppose you have heard that word before. Aristotle is not a naturalist. A naturalist is a man who says, "Everything that is is natural," and that is denied by Aristotle. In the first place, there are things that are not natural: the artifacts. A desk is not a natural thing. It is made by a natural being called man, but it is not in itself natural. Secondly, *nomos*, which means mostly in the text "laws," but which also has the meaning "conventions," things on which men agree, are also not natural. They *are* only by virtue of an agreement; for example, that the monetary unit should be a dollar consisting of hundred cents, or a pound consisting of twenty shillings, and so on. You cannot understand [it] from the nature of the American people, or the climate, or what have you, but this is a settlement arbitrarily made at a given time and is valid only by virtue of this arbitrary settlement. This is the convention.

Then, perhaps most important among the natural things, there is a distinction to be made between what is natural emphatically or perhaps [. . .] and not so. I read to you a passage which we read last time: "The *polis* is by nature, since also the first associations [meaning family, household, and village—LS] are by nature, for the *polis* is the end of those first associations, but nature is the end, for as everything is when the genesis, when the coming into being has been completed, this we say is the nature of everything, be it a man, a horse, a house."ⁱ So that is to say a colt is not yet a horse. It has not yet reached the nature of the horse. It is defective as a horse; or a decrepit mare is also not a horse without qualification but is defective for the opposite reason for

ⁱ Strauss translates *Politics* 1.2, 1252b30–34.

which the colt is defective. And other things, and also the statement which we have read and which a lady wanted to bring up today—we will probably bring it up—that Aristotle thinks in humankind men are superior to the women. You were the one who found the difficulty with that?

Student: The reason I brought that up was for something else, though. The use of the assumption and the analogy between the men are superior to women, and then going from that step to some men are by nature superior to others. Now if one is by convention, then certainly the other could have been by convention, too.

LS: By all means. No, I don't wish to defend Aristotle for [. . .] his somewhat unpleasant statement. [Laughter] I use it only as an example for the time being [. . .] the same distinction between what is more perfect and therefore natural to a higher degree than the [. . .] Whether he is right or wrong is not now the question.

Nature is for Aristotle—and I'll say this only once in this class, and I apologize for the use of the obscene expression, but I have to do it; otherwise you cannot understand it—nature is for Aristotle, in a sense it is a [. . .] Natural things tend toward something. You see it most clearly in the phenomenon of growth: a plant or an animal growing towards a term of growth; and then, after having reached it, it will decay sooner or later. Therefore the ends are natural; they are in the natural phenomena themselves. So in other words, the question doesn't arise whether there is anything good: what is good is what natural beings as natural beings aim at [. . .] aiming at, striving everywhere. Aristotle finds it even in points where today no one would find it, for example, the fall of a heavy body. Aristotle sees there a tendency of the bodies toward the center of the earth. For Aristotle, that is a phenomenon that the natural is good. The most striking difference between modern thought and Aristotelian thought is this: that this fundamental assumption is being questioned in modern times. Melville, in one of his novels,¹ has a man, a preacher, speak of the goodness of nature. And then a fellow who is on the boat on which the preacher makes his sermon says: Well, my eyes are by nature very bad; I owe my ability to see to an oculist in Philadelphia.ⁱⁱ And you can replace this with an infinite variety of other examples for the same effect. What would Aristotle say to it? He would say, of course, nature² doesn't in all cases achieve its goals. But what does that oculist in Philadelphia do?

Student: He imitated.

LS: Exactly. He took a healthy eye, a natural eye, as the model for remedying the defects of this unsatisfactory eye. But in modern times that has become more and more a question, and this questioning has reached its climax in Kant, the question of the goodness of nature. And all the later development including all present-day things are ultimately based on that Kantian question.

Now every man, we can say, is a product of a natural process, like every other natural being. He could not have come into being by mere accident. As we are taught today, at least tacitly: if evolution at a given moment had been a bit different, there would never have been a man, and this would not have meant anything for the whole as a whole. For Aristotle, that is in no way true. Man is for Aristotle the center of the earth; in a way, the center of the whole universe. At

ⁱⁱ Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (NY: Penguin Books, 1990), 132 (chap. 21).

least in this sense according to Aristotle the human soul is in a manner everything. The human soul alone is open to everything that is, neither the soul of brutes, nor the soul of a god who would have no sense perception and therefore not be open to sensitively-perceived things.

This [. . .] universe, the earth overarched by heaven, is according to Aristotle eternal, has not come into being, and will not perish ever. This is most difficult for us³ to accept because we are told and [. . .] for powerful reasons for many centuries, that the visible unit of earth has come into being and will perish again. In order to see the plausibility of Aristotle's suggestion, you must understand and think of only one question. According to the view both of the Bible and of modern science, there was a first man or some first men; that is to say, a human being or some human beings not generated by human beings—now according to the Bible, created by God; according to modern science, coming out of some kind of apes or whatever, a new kind of species not generated by beasts of the same species. We never have seen a human being who was not generated by human beings. We must now assume that there was now such a genesis, such a generation of human beings by non-human beings [. . .] common sense you see on the side of Aristotle, but common sense is not necessarily always right. This is the minimum we must know about Aristotle's general view of nature, if we want to follow any particular statement. Yes?

Student: I was going to ask a question relevant to this question. At different times Aristotle seems to use the word and mean by the word nature something different. When he says the *polis* is natural, he means that it is the *telos* of man, and only in the *polis* can man achieve a certain degree of perfection. On the other hand, when he uses the word nature to say that a man is by nature a slave, he seems to be using it in a different sense. That is, there seems to be some biological implication to this notion.⁴ In one passage he says: "Men are only justly slaves, or should be slaves who are slaves by nature." Now if nature were taken in the teleological sense, this sentence would be tautological; that is, only those people who should be slaves are those people who should be slaves. My question is this. If the statement about slaves being natural is in fact a biological one, to what degree would any possible, say, modern scientific evidence regarding the question of whether there is such a thing as natural inequality or not be relevant to Aristotle's discussion of slavery, indeed to his entire enterprise?

LS: Is the first point of this—with what right do you make a distinction in Aristotle between a biological and a nonbiological statement?

Same Student: I'm not sure I have any [. . .]

LS: I think not the slightest. But let us drop this. And now if—just as evidence supporting evolution is very irrelevant for Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the universe, evidence regarding the natural equality of men would be irrelevant. In other words, if one could show that there are never any human beings who fulfill the conditions which the natural slave according to Aristotle must fulfill, then Aristotle is refuted on this point. But this can never be done, because there are such people who do that. The question is only: What should be done with them? Should they be made slaves or should they be made inmates of special houses like the one in New York that I spoke of?

Same Student: Yes, but the question is also strictly speaking whether these people—this is perhaps an unanswerable question whether these people are slaves by birth, or whether an argument might not be made that their inferior mentality is a product of two hundred years of environment.

LS: Surely. It could be made. It's necessary to make it. The only thing one can say is that if people, on the basis of their prejudices, or ideologies, or whatever you call it, assert the question must not be raised, that's the only impossible position to take. But the other one, whether in a given case inequality may not be due to environmental factors rather than to birth, must always be raised. Only to believe that we know *a priori* in every case of inequality [that] this must be traced to environmental factors, that is a prejudice. How do we know? There is no intrinsic difficulty in assuming natural inequality, strictly [. . .] a question. Aristotle, living today, would say that, I think.

Same Student: But then in a sense the whole question of slavery and much of the [. . .] in which Aristotle is engaged is, let's say, the findings of modern science are relevant to his enterprise and in fact potentially would discredit it.

LS: Not quite. The slavery question is complicated in Aristotle himself. If we speak of natural inequality: if you have a family of, say, five boys, and they have different degrees of intelligence, from the same parents and brought up in the same manner. Now assuming the brightest is the oldest, and then someone might say: Yes, the oldest son has certain advantages which the other children don't have, and hence the environment explains why he is the brightest. Then you find another family of five boys, and there the fourth is the brightest. Then that would seem to show that this hypothesis about the advantages enjoyed by the oldest was unexplained. I think [the] ordinary experience which we all have, and which perhaps a teacher is supposed to have in a more obvious way than many other people, is that there are people who are gifted to different degrees or intelligent to different degrees. That doesn't mean that those who have straight A's are the brightest and those who have straight D's are the most stupid, because straight D's may be straight D's because they do not wish to be bored in classrooms and want to do something else. That goes without saying. There is no such mechanical device for judging intelligence [. . .] The question is whether that is in any way politically relevant. Should people, say, of the highest degree of intelligence [get] ten votes, [people] of the second degree eight votes, and so on and so on, and the lowest only one vote? This would lead to terrible complications and was never seriously suggested by anybody. The theoretical question, Is there inequality among human beings?, I think on the basis of ordinary observation [can] be answered in the affirmative, just as there are obvious differences regarding bodily strength and agility and so on.

Same Student: I agree with that. I don't mean to prolong this, but to say that there are obviously inequalities begs the question because the question is whether there are inequalities by nature.

LS: All right. But as I said before, there is no reason [not] to assume that some of these inequalities are natural, clearly natural. But the question is, in given cases there may be a doubt: Is this inequality natural or infused by, as people call it, society? Then therefore society is responsible. You can see also why the Aristotelian position is so interesting, because Aristotle is

as it were a natural target in this great fight between the people who say the inequalities, the politically interesting inequalities are natural; therefore the actual stratification of society is justified by nature. That is what the conservatives or the reactionaries said. Then you have people who deny that and say: No, that is merely due to a long misuse [. . .] sheer force, violence, and that must be corrected. Aristotle is the clearest and most obvious representative of this now-rejected view. But the question is whether we now do not reject Aristotle's position too unqualifiedly on the basis not of scientific evidence but of our likes or dislikes. Yes . . .

Student: I think that Aristotle made the point that if the difference between men could be shown to be as great as the difference between soul and body, that an argument could be made for the existence of slavery. In other words, just as the soul should be master of the body . . . You keep using the example of inmates in mental institutions, mental defectives of some sort. Now it seems to me that this is the easiest sort of example to choose, and I think medically one might make an argument that better use could be made of these people in terms of their own development than to turn them into slaves, but certainly you can't have an institution of slavery based upon that very small number of people in asylums.

LS: I fully agree with you. I think I made this point, that when Aristotle later on speaks about the institution of slavery as it works or would work in a good society, he contradicts his teaching at the beginning of the work. So the difficulty is within Aristotle himself. That leads to further questions, for which we now are not prepared but we shall take up in time.

Student: With regard to [. . .]'s question, I would think that scientific evidence regarding the biological equalities or inequalities of men would be somewhat irrelevant to the question of slavery, because Aristotle would still say: Well, take somebody who is twelve years old or fifteen years old: I don't care whether or not he is the way he is because he was raised wrong or because he was biologically defective. The question is: What are we going to do with him now?

LS: Sure. But on the other hand, if people [. . .] did not exist in Aristotle's time, but they might have existed, would have said: All right, now you can't change that anymore. But what about the future, of the country, of the race? Must one take precautionary measures that this will not happen again? Say, if someone who is rather dumb but who has an excellent home background and is therefore quite good according to ordinary standards, now would not a boy who did not have such an excellent background, home background but is by nature superior, if he were given the same kind of care would he not be much better, and therefore should we not make a kind of selection according to nature?

Now let me try to state the principle as clearly as I can. Aristotle does not assert of course that all actual social stratification is reasonable, just; but he says on the whole that actual stratifications correspond to the natural stratifications. There are injustices, but they cannot be helped; and the injustice implied in a radical change would be much greater than to bear with the actual [in]justice. That one can say. In this sense, Aristotle was as conservative a man as there ever was one. There is no doubt about that. Yes . . .

Student: I'm not quite sure I have this straight, but if you assume that slavery is natural, that is,

it's a natural institution to some people; and then you also assume that a natural or best man is a man who is not a slave, who is able to control his appetites, his passions and is at least passably intelligent, then you have a problem, because a slave is obviously a man and yet he is an imperfect man. Therefore we have something that is natural that is also imperfect.

LS: That is implied in the teleological concept of nature. Natural processes, if we can use that term, tend toward an end. They do not always reach that end. Wherever there are natural things, there are also defective beings of the same kind, whether they are trees, or beasts, or men. And that cannot be helped.

Student: What I was going to say is related to this. Assuming that it is impossible for the slave to achieve full human goodness, in the last part of the . . . he talks about the slave's moral goodness, and it is not merely a question of degrees of inequality, that is, some people are a little bit better or even a great deal better; but by stating that there is a natural class of slaves, it is a qualitatively different kind of human goodness that is open to them.

LS: There is no contradiction. We come to that passage. We will discuss it. There are some apparent difficulties.

Student: I have a question about the distinction between nature and [. . .] First, is there any conventional action performed by animals other than men?

LS: No. There is the assumption that convention presupposes agreement. I mean, it doesn't have to be a formal agreement—sign on the dotted line—but some exchange of views, and that means speech; therefore only human beings can make a convention. In other words, if a species of birds, let me say, in one country or in one continent differs from the birds in [. . .] the same species in another continent [. . .] that would be from Aristotle's point of view a natural difference to be explained in terms of the climate, ecology, or what have you. But if we find human beings living in the same continent, and they may be close neighbors, who have very different customs which cannot be traced to a difference in the natural [. . .] then Aristotle would say that the reasonings which their legislators made differ, and this difference is due to the fact some [people] at a certain point simply tossed coins in favor of one line of action rather than another [. . .] It must be decided one way. But it is convention. Englishmen are not more left-handed or right-handed than the Frenchmen. I don't know whether someone ever made a study about why the English have left-driving and why the continental people enjoy right-driving.

Student: If a community, let's say of philosophers, made a decision based upon their understanding of nature—in other words, not [. . .] a decision to act together in a certain way—would Aristotle consider that action as conventional?

LS: To the extent to which it is met; say, let us meet tomorrow at 3:00 to have another discussion. Surely it is an agreement. Yes?

Student: If in a *polis* the institution of slavery were based on something other than nature, what

would Aristotle recommend for the health of the *polis* in regard to slavery?

LS: That is hard to say. I mean,⁵ he makes a statement in the *Ethics* about that. That corresponds more or less to what Plato says in the *Laws*. You cannot be a friend with a slave as slave, but you can be a friend with him insofar as he is a human being.ⁱⁱⁱ That means there is no reason whatever why a slave—a conventional slave, that is—should not be on the highest level of any free man of the society. There is not the slightest difficulty with that. Quite a few of the Greek, the classical philosophers were slaves from time to time.

An entirely different question is whether the institution of slavery should be abolished. The question of the individual slave is simply that of—if you have a slave and [. . .] that he should be the slave and you the master, you cannot always emancipate him. This is one thing, and the abolition of the institution of slavery is entirely different. There would have been many reasons in their minds against that, because their whole society rested on slavery. It would have meant not a political but a social revolution, and⁶ they were much more apprehensive of change than we are. We will find this subject discussed by Aristotle in the third book, the whole question of change. Modern men are much more hopeful regarding change than the ancient men, and especially Aristotle. [Of] men who were slaves [it] can be presumed at all times that they were displeased with their being slaves. That's elementary. But this does not mean a principled opposition to slavery. If a fellow from southern Russia was captured in a slave hunt and brought down to Greece, of course he cursed these people and hated them and wished the worst on them, but to put it the other way around, namely, that the Greek would have been captured by his tribe, he would be delighted to have another man's labor at his disposal.

Everyone [dis]likes being maltreated—that goes without saying—but that doesn't mean that he opposes maltreating of human beings as a matter of principle. Now, stated a little bit more precisely and limiting ourselves to slavery, to dislike being a slave is, I suppose, common to all slaves, but that doesn't mean that these same slaves would oppose the institution of slavery if they were the masters. So if some people believe that there was a kind of left in classical antiquity, liberals who opposed slavery in the way in which John Locke opposed slavery—but are there such people? There were people who denied the natural character of slavery; we know this from Aristotle. But this does not prove at all that they proposed the abolition of slavery and proposed it as a practical measure. Yes?

Student: I'm still questioning how slaves can be natural if the only connection between a slave and a non-slave is the fact that one got captured. In other words, that same person lived . . .

LS: My dear—Aristotle says these are conventional slaves, not natural slaves. We come to that right away. Yes?

Student: I wondered about the naturalness of man versus the naturalness of most other natural things insofar as it seems that perfection of man seems to occur much less frequently according to Aristotle than in the rest of nature [. . .] count most perfect men on the fingers of one hand, whereas that does not seem to be the case with respect to the rest of nature.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.11, 1161b5–6; Plato, *Laws* 776d–e.

LS: Not applying very subtle standards but true standards, most horses, if they grow up, will be perfectly healthy horses. In the case of dogs I hesitate to say, because they have created such absurd breeds that one cannot make nature responsible for that. [Laughter] But in the case of man, one could say—well, sometimes politicians, when they speak to an assembly, they take for granted that almost all constituents are good men, don't they, the good people of Gary, Indiana, or wherever the place may be? So in a certain crude way, is it not true that most people, most human beings are normal, also morally normal? If the temptations are not very great, they are decent and this kind of thing, and the slight dishonesties they commit are not taken very seriously. It depends on how you look at it. If you take a strict standard, then it is different. Then you arrive at the conclusion at which Aristotle arrived, that men who are really good men—or to use again the equivalent of the Greek expression, perfect gentlemen—are relatively a small percentage of the population, surely. If you go even beyond perfect gentlemen to the highest kind of man, the wise man [. . .] Yes, that is so, and it is probably connected with the fact that the soul of man is [a] much more complex thing than the soul of a horse. Therefore, connected with that, the perfection of the human soul is much rarer to find than the perfection of the soul or the body of any other being. There would be no difficulty in that, because it has a natural reason.

Same Student: But it seems to me that at that point, man's nature becomes almost a thing unto itself, I mean really distinctly unique among the rest of nature . . .

LS: This is doubtless true, and I think Aristotle never denies that. When he says soul, meaning the human soul, is in a manner all things, he meant that man is in a manner the center of the universe. He meant that. Other people have used the expression that man is a microcosm in the macrocosm, and of course we have a very easy reply to that: it is just foolish human pride. If an elephant could speak, he would say that the elephant is; but the elephants cannot speak and so perhaps if it is pride, the fact that man alone can be proud would prove the radical difference between man and the beasts.

Student: But the distinction between who speaks and who does not speak historically or in terms of evolution is one of degree and not of qualitative difference.

LS: What do you mean by "speak": literally, or what?

Same Student: I'm not sure what I mean.

LS: Do you mean the difference between a dog and a man?

Same Student: Let's say what modern science would consider a man a certain amount of billions of years ago. The only reason I raise this question is again in line with what I raised before. The general problem I have is understanding in what way modern science or modern physics is relevant or irrelevant to the assumptions which Aristotle makes.

LS: That is difficult to answer. Generally stated, it is very relevant. As everyone I believe today admits that there is such a thing like evolution, evolution meaning the genesis of species out of

other species, this didn't exist as a doctrine in classical antiquity. Today we have to accept it, although we may be very doubtful whether it is a universal key as it is thought to be by some people. But we must admit that. That is very important, without any question. No one in his senses can say that Aristotle's teaching, as he stated it, is true on every point. Even in the Middle Ages people did not say that, only for the reason that they also believed in the Bible and therefore could not accept Aristotle's eternity of the universe. The question is, however, whether Aristotle's teaching regarding man in particular, regardless of where man comes from, whether man is the product of such an evolution or whether man was always, man has a certain nature. That is what Aristotle asserts, and nature means also, what is sometimes rendered in translation, that man is essentially different from all other beings.⁷ It is impossible to understand, therefore, man in terms of nonhuman beings, and in particular of subhuman beings; and therefore also in particular impossible to understand political phenomena in terms of subpolitical phenomena, say, economic or whatever it may be. This, one can say, is the crucial thesis of Aristotle's [. . .] There are essential differences within beings. The most important phenomenon regarding beings is that whatever belongs to a kind or class, even if it is the only member of the kind or class. That is another question. These kinds and classes were called by Plato *eidē*, ideas. This is the crucial and characteristic [. . .] of Socrates and his followers Plato and Aristotle. That is the most striking difference between them and our present-day thought, although we are too much heirs to that tradition that we do not speak of the [. . .] of human nature without making clear that when we speak of human nature, we mean a human nature essentially different from the nature of a dog, of a lion, or whatever else it might be.

Student: When Aristotle spoke of the essential difference of man [. . .] mentioned that his ability to speak and communicate was one of the basic differences which distinguished him from other beings. Would he change his definition today, when we know, for example, that whales can talk to each other, porpoises can talk to each other, bulls have political organizations, and many kinds of animal life do have these speech [. . .] and organization?

LS: Aristotle knew of bees and ants; he mentioned them in this connection. He knew also that animals give sounds, but he denies them speech. Now let us reread this passage.

Reader: 1253a, Article 10.^{iv}

And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations as to what is painful and pleasant and to signify these sensations to one another), but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city.^v (1253a8-18)

^{iv} The reader provides the article number used in the Barker translation even though he reads from the Rackham translation. Subsequent instances of this practice are not noted unless necessary for clarity.

^v Rackham has "city-state."

LS: So the question would be whether the animals you have in mind [. . .] communicate by sounds something to each other, maybe warning of danger.

Same Student: I thought that recent studies on animals such as the porpoises, that it wasn't just sounds of dangers but that the porpoises themselves have a very advanced form of communication between them, as far as we know, and that they can think more than just danger and perhaps they do know, in their own world, the difference between right and wrong. Obviously, man has a more developed form . . .

LS: But then the question is this. Assuming for a moment that there is only more or less, would there not be at a certain point on this scale from the less to the more a difference of kind?

Same Student: Certainly.

LS: That's the point. That is the point [with] which Aristotle is here concerned, and Aristotle lays a point on this. *Logos*, speech, as distinguished from sounds, is a peculiarity of man. Man can say: I am a human being. A dog can never say: I am a dog. His barking may mean all kinds of things and all kinds of interesting things, but⁸ [it] can never be speech, articulate speech.

Student: Can man ever live by nature in the sense that animal lives by nature? Is the nature of man such that he must somehow [. . .] by convention?

LS: Surely he needs some kinds of artifacts, in the first place.

Same Student: Yes. A dog [. . .] lives by nature, right?

LS: Yes, sure.

Same Student: No matter what a dog does, it's in line with [. . .] But man—no matter what a man does, it is in line with what the man decides to do, no matter how he decides.

LS: Then you could say that there are quite a few animals which build something, like nests, shelters of sort, as men build houses. But the difference would be between these natural artifacts, say, made by a spider, and the human artifacts, which is possible only through the use of reason; and formerly people said they do that by "instinct," a term which I believe is now obsolete, partly because people would like to transform the essential difference into a difference of degree.

Student: Could you say that a thing's nature largely depends upon what it does best or what thing it does better than anything else? For instance, man in a sense is the best political animal, the most successful. Now if there were a race, say, on Mars, which had a better political society than the one we have, you could say that the Martians were political animals . . .

LS: Yes, but the question would be whether the Martians were not human beings. That would be the first question. And a simple experiment would be whether they can generate, together with an

earthly human being, other human beings. But if not, that would be a very great, amazing surprise, as there would be another species of rational beings different from man. I think we will postpone the discussion up to the point when we know it is useful. [Laughter]

Student: After listening to all these questions, it seems to me that they are not ones that are any kind of real attack at the heart of Aristotle's system. It just seems that with a very little reworking, given any of this kind of proposed scientific knowledge or actual scientific knowledge that we have today, or that we have in the near future, with very little work he could rework this into his system without changing it basically.

LS: I don't understand you. You say what Aristotle did for such an admirable work, there is a relatively small experiential basis. Did you mean that?

Same Student: Yes.

LS: Sure. I believe no one denies that. No one said here that Aristotle was an old fogey.

Same Student: Several people have raised the question as to whether some things, say, possibly the discovery of language in animals or other scientific discoveries that might be made, whether these would change what Aristotle would say. It seems that none of these things would basically change what he would say: they could be worked into what he has already said.

LS: That I do not know. We would have to make much clearer than we have done what language is, and if this language as properly defined would be found in some species of animals, probably species not known to Aristotle himself, it would be of some importance. I mean, Aristotle doesn't come down with a revelation from Mount Sinai. He is a human being who presents the best he has found out, and we must read it with proper respect, but also with proper criticism.

Student: Perhaps I didn't make myself clear with the Martians. What I was saying was, you can say it's true that ants have a sort of political society, or baboons, but they are not political animals in the sense that their political societies are not as successful as ours.

LS: But that one could doubt, whether human societies are very successful. That is a long question, but I would say simply this. The simple facts that man has learned from animals—quite a few things from spiders, bees—and they don't learn from man would seem to show that the capacity to learn, which has very much to do with reason, is radically different in man from what you find in any other beast. Now this is the last question.

Student: You mentioned before that natural slaves still might not want to enter into the natural state of relationship because of a fear of maltreatment. Was that right?

LS: I didn't say that. I said I imagined that any slave—in fact, we spoke of conventions then—any slave dislikes⁹ [being] a slave, which does not mean that he is opposed to the institution of slavery.

Same Student: My question deals with—while it might be that the natural slave might still be hesitant to become such a slave, wouldn't this in fact be sort of an indication—if he were in fact a natural slave, wouldn't this be some indication of his lack of intelligence, that is, his inability to see that the natural slave relationship would be in fact best for him? It is not simply best for the master.

LS: You mean a natural slave who doesn't wish to be a slave, who rebels against being enslaved, would by this very fact prove that he's [. . .] That is a hard thing to say, because also the conventional slaves would do it, and you can't in this way find an empirical difference between the natural and the conventional slave. You would have to be a bit more specific. Think of it in practical terms. You have a natural and a conventional slave. Both rebel. What is the difference between their rebellion which shows that the one should be a slave and the other should not be a slave?

But I think it is wiser now to turn to the discussion of the conventional slave, because of this we have not spoken at all. We begin best in 1255a, Article 4. So Aristotle has proven in his way up to this point that there are men who are by nature slaves, and that means where it is just that they be slaves and also conducive to their interest as well as to the interest of the masters. Now we come to the other school of thought, which says that slavery is in all cases unjust. And what do they say?

Reader: 1255a, Article 1.

But at the same time it is not difficult to see that those who assert the opposite are also right in a manner. The fact is that the terms 'slavery' and 'slave' are ambiguous; for there is also such a thing as a slave or a man that is in slavery by law— (1255a3-6)

LS: Yes. Or by convention. Someone here wanted a simple illustration of¹⁰ the conventional slave: that would be one. That is to say, this is not by nature, but a convention. Now read to us.

Reader:

or the *nomos* is a sort of agreement under which the things conquered in war are said to belong to their conquerors.^{vi} (1255a4-9)

LS: So in other words, that is an agreement which people made, for good or bad reasons, but this institution owes its being exclusively to this agreement: that not only the inanimate possessions of the vanquished would be taken away, but the vanquished themselves would become the property of the victors. That is agreed upon, meaning both sides agreed. Whoever wins enslaves the others. There is nothing immediately unjust in that.

Reader:

Now this conventional right is arraigned by many jurists just as a statesman is impeached for proposing an unconstitutional measure; they say that it is monstrous if the person powerful enough to use force, and superior in power, is to have the victim of his force as his slave and subject; and even among the learned, some hold this view, though others hold the other.

^{vi} Rackham has "*nomos*."

[(1244a9-12)]

LS: In other words, what would these people say? These people say it is impossible, a matter of indignation, that power as such should make right. The mere fact that tribe A won that battle should make them the just owners of the members of tribe B.

Reader:

But the reason of this dispute and what makes the theories overlap is the fact that in a certain manner virtue when it obtains resources has in fact very great power to use force, and the stronger party always possesses superiority in something that is good, so that it is thought that force cannot be devoid of goodness—

LS: Let us stop here for a moment. Why are these people wrong who simply say, and believe that this settles the issue, that power does not make right? In the first place, justice—or more generally, virtue,¹¹ if it is properly equipped, if it is sufficiently equipped to perform virtuous actions, is in a manner most powerful. So the fact that tribe A vanquished tribe B does not have to be traced simply to sheer superiority in bodily force or the other way around; power is never without some superiority, without some virtue in some respect. For instance, military discipline: that's nothing to despise. There may be very great abominations [in] a given people at a given time, and yet military discipline and everything going with it is something which one should rather imitate than despise. Now how does he go on?

Reader:

but that the dispute is merely about the justice of the matter (for it is due to the one party holding that the justification of authority is goodwill, while the other identifies justice with the mere rule of the stronger); because obviously if these theories be separated apart, the other theories have no force or plausibility at all, implying that the superior in goodness has no claim to rule and be master. (1255a16-21)

LS: Now let us stop here. Now those unreasonable people who start from simple belief that the thesis “might does not make right” settles the issue, this disregards the complex relation between power and right; and say it is only a question of right, and we must wholly disregard the question of power, as if power were so simply divorced from right. And then they say “right is goodwill”—well, one could almost say human kindness. Clearly the people who enslave the others are not animated by good will toward the slaves; that goes without saying. Now when that is that Aristotle doesn't develop here [. . .] then they mean of course we must wholly disregard the question of power. There are sometimes extreme people, even in our enlightened age, who hold this view without using these terms. Right is goodwill, and power is wholly irrelevant as far as these matters are concerned. The opponents of these people, however, say right is simply the rule of the stronger, without going into the question of the virtue involved in being strong, the moral virtue. Both are extreme and abstract views and both are rejected by Aristotle.

And now there is still another kind of people, I think . . .

Reader:

But some persons, doing their best to cling to some principle of justice (for the *nomos*^{vii} is a principle of justice), assert that the enslavement of prisoners of war is just; yet at the same time they deny the assertion, for there is the possibility that wars may be unjust in their origin and one would by no means admit that a man that does not deserve slavery can be really a slave—otherwise, we shall have the result that persons reputed of the highest nobility are slaves and the descendants of slaves if they happen to be taken prisoners of war and sold. (1255a21-29)

LS: So in other words [. . .] is a bit more complicated. The starting point here of Aristotle is this. There are people who do not go into this refined question: What is right in itself? Is it goodwill, or is it what goes with strength, superiority? And say right is law, and now what does the law say? The law says that people taken prisoners in war are to be enslaved and sold into slavery. So that is more or less a position which I stressed before. When the slave is dissatisfied with being a slave, this does not necessarily mean that he opposes institutional slavery; he only wants it the other way around. But this is not quite correct. Aristotle tells us something in this passage which was just read. What do they say?

Now first Aristotle's criticism. People taken prisoners in war are justly enslaved. Aristotle says that. If you want to be so lawful, why don't you look first whether the war as such was lawful? If the war was not just in the first place, its outcome, the enslavement of the defeated, cannot be lawful or just. That is number one. And secondly, what they ordinarily imply is this, that they do not say, by any means: We won, and so you are our slave. If you had won, we would be your slaves, and that is that. Such objectivity, if I may use this word, is very rare among human beings. So they would say: No, we are entitled to enslave you, but if you would enslave us, that would be a gross injustice because we are better than you; we are by nature your superiors. Between Greeks and barbarians this was the ordinary situation. Go on.

Reader: 1255a, Article 6.

Therefore, they do not mean to assert that Greeks themselves if taken prisoners are slaves, but that barbarians are. Yet, when they say this, they are merely seeking for the principles of natural slavery, of which we spoke at the outset. (1255a29-34)

LS: So these people in ordinary discussions take for granted, are compelled to make a distinction between natural slaves and conventional slaves, because they say Greeks may enslave barbarians but barbarians may not enslave Greeks. Therefore they admit what I, Aristotle, have been trying to say all the time: that there is a difference between the natural slave and the conventional slave. From this it does not follow that Aristotle agrees with the vulgar Greek view. We will find later evidence that Aristotle does not agree with it. He uses only these common vulgar views as a kind of commonsensical support or rather starting point for leading up to what is his view, that natural slavery is not conventional slavery. Now what follows regarding conventional slavery then?

Reader:

For they are compelled to say that there exist certain persons who are essentially slaves everywhere and certain others who are so nowhere. And the same also applies about

^{vii} In original: "law."

nobility: our nobles consider themselves noble not only in their own country but everywhere, but they think that barbarian noblemen are only noble in their own country—which implies that there are two kinds of nobility and of freedom, one absolute and the other relative, as Helen says in Theodectes:

‘But who would dare to call me menial, / The scion of a twofold stock divine.’

Yet, in so speaking, they make nothing but virtue and vice the distinction between slave and free, the noble and the base-born; for they assume that just as from a man springs a man, and from a brute a brute, so also from good parents comes a good son; but as a matter of fact, nature frequently while intending to do this is unable to bring this about. (1255a28-1255b4)

LS: So in other words, in practice matters are a bit complicated, and there may sometimes be a man belonging to the lowest segment of society who would deserve to be the absolute ruler of everyone else. And that can happen. But the question is: Can you, on the basis of this occasional deficiency of nature, change the social order from top to bottom? Is this wise? Is this expedient? We will come to a discussion of that in book 3. Now let us read the end of this passage.

Reader: 1255b, Article 10.

And the slave is a part of the master—he is, as it were, a part of the body, alive but yet separated from it; hence, there is a certain community of interest and friendship between slave and master in cases when they have been qualified by nature for those positions, although when they do not hold them in that way but by *nomos*^{viii} and by constraint of force, the opposite is the case. (1255b11-16)

LS: I think Aristotle comes out very clearly against conventional slavery. This *nomos*, this convention that men caught in war are justly enslaved is rejected by him. They must deserve, from their fundamental natural defects, to be enslaved. Then and then only can there be truly slaves, and can this whole relation be a fair and human relation. The great difficulty, which I have indicated before, is: How do we get a reasonable supply of slaves on this basis? And that is clear we will never get it, and therefore that is something fundamentally defective; and we must then try to understand how Aristotle viewed this contradiction, this particular contradiction in which he got involved. We have not yet the basis for solving this question. Now there are a few more passages a bit later.

So Aristotle has proven then that ruling as a master and the political art are by no means identical things, because ruling as a master does not presuppose in any way a knowledge, whereas the art of political rule is a kind of knowledge. You are a master by nature and not by some specific knowledge of how to govern slaves. And in particular, of course, as Aristotle develops here, say you have a slave whom you use for preparing your meals: it would be preposterous to think that the master should teach the slave how to prepare meals. It would be much beneath his dignity. Let us see in 1255b.

^{viii} Rackham has “law.”

Reader: 1255b, Article 4.

The master's function consists not in acquiring slaves, but in employing them. This science however is one of no particular importance or dignity: the master must know how to direct the tasks which the slave must know how to execute. Therefore all people rich enough to be able to avoid personal trouble have a steward who takes this office, while they themselves engage in politics or philosophy. (1255b32-37)

LS: That is a famous passage. We have here the masters, and they lead the political life, govern the *polis*, and/or they engage in philosophy. Philosophy can be used here in the broad meaning, love of wisdom, and that is not restricted to technical philosophy. It surely is something different from political life. This much is clear from the [. . .] either the one or the other. These are the two activities which are truly human and to which only a small part of the human race is enabled by nature. We know the problem today, the great change effected in the lives of all of us by the enormous labor savings brought about by technological progress. And the question is, as Aristotle mentioned before through a fantastic example: Could there not be a state of affairs in which all hard and dirty and boring work would be done by machines, and so that all men could devote themselves to a truly human life, to a life of politics or philosophy? That is surely an entirely new situation of which Aristotle did not dream, but the fundamentals of these problems were known to him. There is a life of drudgery to which man is by nature condemned¹² and yet which is not the natural life of man as a rational being. From this point of view, the modern technological development is merely an unquestionable progress beyond what Aristotle dreamed of, and yet fundamentally along the lines of Aristotle. The question is only whether this solution brought about by art, by human inventiveness, and in no way suggested by nature itself, whether this does not have its drawbacks, whether there is not some hitch here. As you know, the present malaise in the world, not only in this country, has something to do with that, especially if you look at the most fortunate countries which have no complicated racial problems, which have no complicated problems of unemployment and so on—the Scandinavian countries especially—and where human happiness does not seem to have increased with the increase of the possibility for everyone either to participate in human life or to devote himself to wisdom, or maybe do both at the same time.

But one point we must read, because under no circumstances do I engage in apologetics for Aristotle. We want to see his teaching as it was, in its beauty as well as its non-beauty. Go on.

Reader:

The science of acquiring slaves—

LS: Science here in the wide sense means the same as art.

Reader:

is different both from their ownership and from their direction—that is, the just acquiring of slaves, being like a sort of warfare or hunting. (1255b37-38)

LS: So there is the other side, the seamy side of slavery. It is all very well. You have a slave. You are a nice and gentle master, and the slave is a kind and willing slave, and it is a very human

relation. But how does this relation come into being? The slave may have been born from a slave in your house, but that was not the origin. Originally they were hunted; and this hunting: Who does the hunting? This would be the crucial question because it is a question of the origin. Well, there may be nasty people who do nothing but hunting, slave-trading, but there may also be gentlemen who do it. I have never studied the details of ancient slavery, but only in reading such men like Plato and Aristotle. Do you remember? Some of you will remember the *Protagoras*. Hippocrates . . .

Student: The young man who didn't get to the conversation on time because he was up all night chasing a runaway slave.

LS: Yes.

Same Student: Then he came to Socrates.

LS: Of course, not a word is said by Plato to indicate disapproval of this activity.^{ix} If you have the institution of slavery, [there will be] people who avail themselves of this right to hunt fugitive slaves, but Plato or Socrates wouldn't have done it. In other words, the gentlemen in the ordinary sense of the term would go after fugitive slaves, and those who are of greater delicacy, as he would say—although that would not be the proper word because there were really tough [. . .] but Plato [. . .] They wouldn't do it. This is the crucial implication of the institution of slavery.

From the point of view of the history of human thought, and political thought in particular, I believe it is of some importance to make clear this point of Aristotle's. The ordinary schema which we have today in modern times, with perfect justice, between a right and a left which changes the course of centuries—naturally it is changing before our eyes—still, this is a sensible [. . .] on the whole [. . .] is not applicable to early ages.

There was an American scholar called Havelock who wrote back some years ago on liberalism [. . .] philosophy, and he tried to prove that there was a school of liberals in the present-day American sense in classical thought.^x I think that is a wholly groundless assertion. There were people who opposed the Socratic–Platonic–Aristotelian view, but the reason was not any sympathy for the underdog or anything of this kind, but theoretical rejection of all convention of all society. On the other hand, the quest for a perfectly good society, for a just society, that quest stems from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and not from these other people who rejected the *polis* altogether as a mere conventional thing which no sensible man would take seriously, and which he would only¹³ [exploit] to his benefit since it offered some great conveniences but which is not truly respectable. Yes?

Student: Since Aristotle says the art of ordering the slave is not the same as using the slave [. . .]

^{ix} Plato, *Protagoras* 310c.

^x Eric A. Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). Strauss published an especially negative review of this book in *Review of Metaphysics* 12 (1959):390–439.

applies to the particular virtue of the master, does this mean that the master need not concern himself with the origin of his slave? Would this be perhaps a practical solution to the problem indicated earlier in the class, that if you are going to have a viable slavery system, there would have to be many more people in the system who are slaves than would ordinarily be slaves by nature?

LS: I think there are two questions. One I understand. Is a decent master under an obligation to find out whether the slave in question has been honestly acquired, just as you would not buy something from a fence, if that's the proper word? Yes, but you know there are limits set; if you have no reason to doubt that the seller is as honest as such people generally are, then it would be an infinite regress then to begin investigations. That is number one. Now the other point I did not quite follow.

Same Student: I wondered if he made the distinction here where he says [. . .] distinguished very sharply, the art of acquiring, the art of using [. . .] in order to solve the practical problem which we brought up earlier in the class, where¹⁴ if you want to have a slavery system, it would imply there would be many slaves in it, and perhaps many more than would be slaves by nature. So this is the practical way that the master solves the problem for himself. I say, well, this simply is not my concern, how did he gain the slaves.

LS: He may be in the ordinary sense of the term a just man—I mean, he doesn't steal, crudely speaking, but if he knows that some very fishy things have been going on before the merchandise appeared on the market, I believe it creates a great problem. It depends a bit on how strong one's moral stomach is, how much it can digest, and the more sensitive people would feel there is something fundamentally wrong. Let us see how the argument develops later, especially in books 7 and 8 when he speaks of slavery in the perfect *polis*, because slavery as it existed, let's say in Athens—one could always say that Athens was a rather imperfect *polis*; this doesn't supply a proper basis for a judgment. Let us see how slavery in a perfect *polis* looks. Then we will begin to judge.

Session 4: October 11, 1967
Book 1, chapters 8–11

Leo Strauss: That was a spirited paper, but not always correct.ⁱ You had quite a bit of criticism of Aristotle. This shows the difficulties with which one is confronted. Now what you said at the end, this difficulty does not exist. It is created only by your using the term “the state.” There is a great complication which Aristotle will make clear only in the sequel, especially in book 3, and that is that there are two things inseparable from one another but radically different from each other; and the first is the *polis*, and the second is what in Greek is called *politeia*, the form of the *polis*—the *regime*, as I translate it. No *polis* is without a regime. As for the women and children, for example, they must be educated, treated, managed, or whatever you call it with a view to the regime. The treatment will differ in a democracy on the one hand, and in an aristocracy on the other. So if you speak of the state, you take something which is politically neutral, whereas Aristotle does not recognize such a neutrality except in a very provisional consideration, like that of the first few pages of the *Politics*. But this now would lead us too far. That is a crucial point, and not something thought out by Aristotle since he was a philosopher, whatever that may mean; but Aristotle puts here his finger on the nerve of political life as one becomes aware especially in times of crisis but as one can also see it in quiet times. There is never a political society which is not, does not have a specific political purpose, whether that is democratic, or oligarchic, or fascist; but without such a specific character, a *polis* is impossible. That is the great theme of the first part of book 3.

The term “natural right” which was lavishly used by Mr. [. . .] had no basis in the text. Still, I understand how he was tempted to do it, and once you understand the temptation, you understand also that one doesn’t resist the temptation. But the temptation was created by this. You said the art of acquisition, and that is what Aristotle says is a bad [. . .] is concerned with living, whereas a true one is concerned with living well. Perhaps these were not exactly the words you used, but these are the terms which Aristotle uses. I mean, that people try to amass wealth, wealth upon wealth without any limit to it: that is fundamentally an error. This error is due to the fact that there exists such a thing in the world called money, of which there is no limit in mere numbers. You know, whether you should stop at five thousand or five hundred thousand, or five million, there is no intrinsic limit; that is entirely homogeneous. But if you think of true wealth, what you need for living well, there are qualitative limits, and therefore the one kind of acquisition is good and the other is bad. Here he makes this point that the people who acquire and acquire without any end, without any limit, that has to do with the fact that they are concerned only with living and not with living well. Do you remember that?

Student: But also with anxiety over their livelihood.

LS: That’s the same. In other words, you have a man here who says: I don’t know what will happen, I may live up to ninety years, where I’m wholly unable to earn any more money, and there may be inflation and invasions; and so in order to be absolutely safe, I amass as much as I

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student’s paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

can. Now who stated the principle involved in the clearest and the most beautiful way?

Student: Hobbes.

LS: Hobbes, sure, only Hobbes doesn't speak of money in particular, but he includes it. He calls it power. If self-preservation is the only stable foundation for [. . .] but if you want to preserve yourself, you need means of self-preservation: that is to say, power, power in the widest sense, where not only a stick or a gun is power, but also food of course, without which you could not live. Hobbes draws this conclusion that since self-preservation is a starting point, we are led to the conclusion that human life is nothing but striving of power after power, and a striving that ceases only in death, and forever more. So here is an agreement, although they take ultimately different sides; but Hobbes cannot have a clear concept of living well, which Aristotle has. That's the great difference. Since Hobbes calls this striving for preservation, and what is implied in it, a natural right, to that extent you are justified in your using it, but not on the¹ [basis] of Aristotle.

Student: I guess we can bring it up later.

LS: No. I hope so. This is what I wanted to suggest. If we come to the passages, and [. . .] and you feel that I did not dispose of your difficulties, you interrupt and tell me. The same privilege, of course, is enjoyed by everyone.

We have seen that the city consists of houses. It emerges immediately out of villages, but the villages as villages are not preserved necessarily within the city. They may be preserved by the grace of the city as administrative units, but the houses are necessarily preserved, the households or families. Now if you say, "Why not abolition of the family?", that is a good question, but this we take up when we come to the second book, where Aristotle takes issue with Plato's communism. So the household is the unit beneath the city. The art or knowledge or science dealing with the household is called *oikonomikē*, from which the English word economics is obviously derived. The first question is the economic art, the art of household management, is this the same as the art of moneymaking? You see already in Aristotle's time economics had taken on part of the meaning which it has today. No one would today call the art of managing one's wife and children a part of economics, but the art of moneymaking would still be regarded as an important part of economics,² at least of private economics.

Now when Aristotle decides the question, first, of what is the relation between the economic art and the moneymaking art,³ Aristotle says they cannot be identical because the economic art is directed toward use of wealth, whereas the moneymaking art is directed toward acquisition and using and acquiring are two essentially different activities. This much is clear. The using art is always higher than the acquiring or producing. For example, the man who produces weapons, he is subject,⁴ not in law but as far as his art is concerned, to the military, to the generals. The generals will tell him, or employees of the general called scientists will tell him what kinds of weapons they need. In this sense, acquisitive art is inferior, ministerial to the economic art.

Now Aristotle raises a further question. Is it true that the acquisitive art, the art of acquiring, is identical with the moneymaking art? Or is there not a kind of acquisition which is more fundamental, more natural, than the moneymaking art? Now let us turn to 1256a19. Now here he begins to speak of the primary and fundamental forms of acquisition, and⁵ the starting point is that man needs food. You can also add housing and shelter, but that would only complicate matters and would not make them clearer. So let us limit ourselves to the most elementary need, which is that of food.

Reader:

But furthermore, there are many sorts of food, owing to which both many animals and men have many modes of life; for it is impossible to live without food, so that the differences of food have made the lives of animals different. Among wild animals, some are nomadic and others solitary, according to whichever habit is advantageous for their supply of food, because some of them are carnivorous, others graminivorous, and others eat all kinds of food; so that nature has differentiated their modes of life to suit their facilities and their predilection for those articles of food. And as different animals by nature relish different sorts of food, and not each kind the same, even within the classes of carnivorous and graminivorous animals their modes of life differ from one another. And similarly in the human race also. (1256a19-30)

LS: Let us stop here. The point which I would like to make is this. Nature has separated the various tribes of animals, and also embodied certain intra-human differences. This is shown by the fact that not the same thing is pleasant by nature to everything. Pleasant by nature means it is conceivable that someone might compel himself to find pleasant, say, the food of a donkey or a duck. But it would not be by nature pleasant for him. Now this is a point which I must mention, but Aristotle implies here—although he doesn't speak of that—[that] here is the essential defect of that thinking that is called hedonism, the view that the good is identical with the pleasant. Its obvious defect is this. Different things are pleasant to different kinds of beings—to say nothing now of the difference within the human race—so pleasure and pain depend fundamentally on the character of the being concerned. This character of the being, this essential character of the being, determines the range of pleasure and pain and therefore is the fundamental moral fact. Therefore we cannot start our bearings in morals from pleasure, but we must start from the essential character of the kind of being, because the essential character of the kind of being, say, a dog, donkey, man determines the specific ends which these various kinds of beings pursue.

Then he develops it somewhat later. Perhaps you can read it, Mr. [. . .], in 1256a, page 20.ⁱⁱ Aristotle has given the many ways in which human beings find the means of their livelihood, and now after having enumerated them, the ways of life are more or less as many . . . yes?

Reader:

This then virtually completes the list of the various modes of life, those at least that have their industries sprung from themselves and do not procure their food by barter and trade—the lives of the herdsman, the husbandman, the raider, the fisherman, the hunter. Others

ⁱⁱ Strauss refers to the page number of the Barker translation, but the reader continues to read from the Rackham translation.

also live pleasantly by combining some of these pursuits, supplementing the more deficient life where it happens to fall short in regard to being self-sufficing: for instance, some combine a pastoral life and raiding,ⁱⁱⁱ others husbandry and hunting, and similarly with the others—they pass their time in such a combination of pursuits as their need compels. Property of this sort then seems to be bestowed by nature herself upon all— (1256a39-1256b8)

LS: These are the natural ways of earning a livelihood; say, in the case of fishing and hunting, there is no great difficulty to say this is provided by nature. In the case of agriculture, we could say there is minor human intervention here required, sowing and so on, but in the case of taking away from other human beings by force, robbery, it seemed a bit hard. But still, there is the natural force and natural spiritedness of some kind of people compared with defects, because one of the defects of others would also seem to show that it is natural. Now let us go on.

Reader:

bestowed by nature herself upon all, as immediately—

LS: Aristotle now has to give some sign or some kind of proof that this assertion that nature supplies men with food is natural—I'm sorry, give some proof that nature supplies men with food. Is nature such a friendly or benevolent goddess, so to speak? Go on.

Reader:

immediately upon their first coming into existence, so also when they have reached maturity. For even at the original coming into existence of the young some kinds of animals bring forth with them at birth enough sustenance to suffice until the offspring can provide for itself, for example all the species that bear their young in the form of larvae or eggs. The viviparous species have sustenance for their offspring inside themselves for a certain period, the substance called milk.

LS: So you see here is the posture of the scientific man, who notes the fact that this is popularly known, this thing, and popularly known as milk, but he is somehow on a higher level where this name-giving is not a foregone conclusion.

Reader:

We must suppose that nature also provides for them in a similar way when grown up, and that plants exist for the sake of animals and the other animals for the good of man, the domestic species both for his service and for his food, and if not all at all events most of the wild ones for the sake of his food and of his supplies of other kinds, in order that they may furnish him both with clothing and other appliances. If therefore nature makes nothing incomplete^{iv} or in vain, it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of man. Hence even the art of war will by nature be in a manner an art of acquisition (for the art of hunting is a part of it) that is properly employed both against wild animals and against such of mankind as though designed by nature for subjection refused to submit to it, inasmuch

ⁱⁱⁱ Rackham has “brigandage.”

^{iv} Rackham has “without purpose.”

as this warfare is by nature just. (1256b15-26)

LS: Here is a very remarkable statement and unique in Aristotle, and the view here expressed is generally known by teleology, but that is quite different from Aristotle's teleology in general because here we have not only the internal teleology, meaning, say, a dog embryo is meant to grow into a full-fledged dog, but that there is also an external teleology with a view to man. So let's say crocodiles and tigers and what have you are all made by nature for the use of man. This is a teaching peculiar to the *Politics*, and Aristotle doesn't state it without qualification as one ought to, so that one ought to assume [. . .] ought to believe.

Student: Barker mistranslated that crucial [. . .] at the beginning of Article 12. Barker says "accordingly, as" and it's "if."^v We caught that last time.

LS: Oh, I didn't know that. At any rate, in what sense could Aristotle seriously make this assertion, and not in this connection, where he addresses not simply men of science but gentlemen who are not supposed to be so strict as men of science are regarding such matters? That men can make use of poisonous animals, even—for example, for pharmaceutical purposes—was of course well known in Aristotle's time, and it's no difficulty that quite a few things which seem to be useless can become useful to man. There are limits to that: for example, what is the use of lice and other such unpleasant beasts? Rats, of which you hear so much now—we would all be much better off without the rats. In what way can Aristotle say that everything is for the sake of man? If we enlarge the point a bit and understand usefulness in the wider sense, now what is the highest activity of man according to Aristotle? Some of you must know that.

Student: Considering things according to their essences?

LS: Understanding, knowledge. Now is not every being useful for man's knowledge? So if we take man not only in his creature needs, food, shelter, and so on, but as a thinking, understanding, learning being, then one could indeed say every being is for the sake of man, even a louse. From observing a louse you can learn amazing things, as every biologist can tell you. But as I say, this is not to be taken in the literal sense as a necessary and true Aristotelian teaching.

Nature provides food for man, as is shown especially in the case of the newly born, but also in other ways, and therefore there is a natural kind of acquisition: acquiring that which is by nature meant to be for man. This is surely a part of the management of households, the art of household management. This art, this natural acquisitive art is not infinite, clearly. If you think of what a sensible man, even in order to live comfortably, would need, that is very limited. Maybe much beyond what we as individuals have; while we may be poor, that's too bad, but it is surely finite. This he develops in the immediate sequel.

Now he turns thereafter to the other kind of acquisitive art, the moneymaking, and that is in

^v The student's comment refers to a problem found in Barker's translation. Rackham's translation was the one read in class.

1256b40.

Reader:

But there is another kind of acquisition that is specially called wealth-getting, and that is so called with justice; and to this kind it is due that there is thought to be no limit to riches and property. Owing to its affinity to the art of acquisition of which we spoke, it is supposed by many people to be one and the same as that; and as a matter of fact, while it is not the same as the acquisition spoken of, it is not far removed from it. One of them is natural, the other is not natural, but carried on rather by means of the certain acquired skill or art. (1256b40-1257a5)

LS: That is a clear statement of the question, and now Aristotle will explain to us the second kind of acquisitive art, which we may call the moneymaking art.

Reader:

We may take our starting-point for its study from the following consideration: with every article of property there is a double way of using it; both uses are related to the article itself, but not related to it in the same manner—one is peculiar to the thing and the other is not peculiar to it. Take for example a shoe—there is its wear as a shoe and there is its use as an article of exchange; for both are ways of using a shoe, inasmuch as even he who barter a shoe for money or food with the customer that wants a shoe uses it as a shoe, though not for the use proper to a shoe, since shoes have not come into existence for the purpose of barter. (1257a6-13)

LS: Stop here for a moment. This is the starting point, that there is a twofold use of things, of property, things belong[ing] to property: a proper use and a non-proper use. I don't say "improper" there because that needs a proof. The proper use of a shoe, that's clear: to wear it. The proper use of a hat, the proper use of a gun, the proper use of glasses, the proper use of a pencil, and so on; but all these things can also have a non-proper use, and this non-proper use is the use as an article of exchange. But, as Aristotle asserts, even in this non-proper use as an article of exchange, its peculiarity being glasses, shoes, pencil are still important. At least one of the two exchanges is concerned with using the thing, and even if [. . .] a money economy where neither the buyer nor the seller is interested in the use, yet the ultimate customer of course is.

Now this distinction is the starting point of Marx's famous analysis of commodities, and I think we should remind ourselves about it. I take here the English translation of *Kapital*, Modern Library Edition, page 44 following.^{vi} Marx makes here a distinction between the exchange values and the use values:⁶ "As use-values, commodities are, above all, of different qualities"—Marx uses a very wide and vague expression, "qualities," for what Aristotle would⁷ [call] essential difference—"but as exchange values they are merely different quantities, and consequently do not contain an atom of use-value." You see he goes much beyond Aristotle. Aristotle would say the use element is always there.

^{vi} Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: Modern Library, 1906), 44 (book 1, part 1, chap. 1).

Student: If we assume that some sort of commodity standard of money as opposed to a fiat standard [. . .] some sort of metallic coins, economic theory would dictate that if there were a differential between its use value and its commodity value and its value as a money, if they were to differ there would be a flow between the two to establish a market of delivery. Why does not Aristotle assume that to take place?

LS: Aristotle does not consider that possibility because he is not concerned with this kind of economic theory. In other words, he tries to lay the foundation for any possible economic theory in the modern sense by trying to understand the difference between use and exchange, and from exchange then from barter [. . .] Then Marx goes on as follows:

“If then we leave out of consideration the use-value of commodities, they have only one common property left, that of being products of labor” [and therefore the only proper way of determining the exchange value is the amount of labor—LS] . . . All are reduced to one and the same sort of labor, human labor in the abstract. Let us now consider the residue of each of these products [residue if we disregard use—LS] it consists of the same unsubstantial reality in each, a mere congelation of homogeneous human labor, of labor-power expended without regard to the mode of its expenditure. All that these things now tell us [considered merely as commodities—LS] is that human labor-power has been expended in their production, then human labor is embodied in them. When looked at as crystals of the social substance [labor—LS], common to them all, they are Values.”

Of course Marx doesn’t deny that ultimately the use value is the starting point of all [. . .] value, yet in the complicated and late capitalistic society, or in any money society, this ceases to be the crucial factor. The emphasis shifts entirely on labor, of which Aristotle says here hardly a word.

I thought in this connection I should read to you a passage from that man who began to speak of labor, human labor, as decisive as far as value is concerned; and that is John Locke, in his *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, chapter 5, Of Property, where he traces labor as the source of all value. And what about nature? Doesn’t nature supply valuable things in the first place, like that milk in the mother’s breast, or like the metals or diamonds she has made available to men in the mountains and in streams? Answer: “Nature and the Earth furnished only the almost worthless Materials, as in themselves.”^{vii} Nature is not the supplier of man’s needs, as Aristotle suggests⁸; nature is not a kind mother but a very stingy stepmother, and man has to drag with his own effort everything from that stingy source. So the source of all value in the old sense of the word, not in the sense in which it is now used, value for life, is human labor. And Marx draws the ultimate conclusions from this great change. But what you see in general here, and that is of the utmost importance, is this great change. In Aristotle nature is the source, not only of food, but also of all our ends which we can reasonably pursue. They are established by nature.

Knowledge is a natural act which requires some artificial techniques sometimes, but fundamentally knowledge is a natural act of man. At the other end, nature is a kind of [. . .] or a kind of chaos into which man brings some order and value by his efforts. What Locke says here

^{vii} John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. 5, sec. 43.

about labor as the source of all value is fundamentally the same as what Kant says in his seemingly very different context, that reason—and he means here human reason—prescribes nature its laws.^{viii} The laws are not inherent in nature and discovered there by man, but reason prescribes nature its laws. Man is the source of all order and meaning, versus the Aristotelian view that nature is the source of all order and meaning. I thought we should at least mention that.

Now Aristotle goes on here, if we turn to 1257a19, where he speaks of the first community; and this is the house, it is obvious, manifest.

Reader:

In the primary association, therefore (I mean the household) there is no function for trade, but it only arises after the association has become more numerous. For the members of the primitive household used to share commodities that were all their own, whereas on the contrary a group divided into several households participated also in a number of commodities belonging to their neighbors, according to their needs for which they were forced to make interchanges by way of barter, as also many barbarian tribes do still; for such tribes do not go beyond exchanging actual commodities for actual commodities, for example giving and taking wine for corn, and so with the various other things of this sort. Exchange on these lines therefore is not contrary to nature, nor is it any branch of the art of wealth-getting, for it existed for the replenishment of natural self-sufficiency; yet out of it the art of business in due course arose. For when they had come to supply themselves more from abroad by importing things in which they were deficient and exporting those of which they had a surplus, the employment of money necessarily came to be devised. For the natural necessities are not in every case readily portable; hence for the purpose of barter men made a mutual compact to give and accept some substance of such a sort as being itself a useful commodity was easy to handle and use for general life, iron, for instance, silver, and other metals, at the first stage defined merely by size and weight, but finally also by impressing on it a stamp in order that this might relieve them of having to measure it; for the stamp was put on as a token of the amount. (1257a19-41)

LS: Let us stop here. In other words, barter, this kind of exchange, causes no difficulty. This is a natural enlargement of the primary acquisition. Say you have a bad harvest one year and you don't have enough food, but ten miles away from you there are people who did not suffer from this particular plight and so they have too much: you exchange. Perhaps you exchange with a view to the next harvest, and so there is no difficulty because the kindness of nature is not so that certain disasters of this sort are not a bit [. . .] Now there may be other things; a certain community may have salt, and more salt than they can use, and you have more sheep than you can use. What is more simple and natural and harmless than to exchange salt for sheep, and so on?

And now things become more complex, and then people introduce something which can be exchanged even if you do not have something which these people need. Say the people with which you would like to exchange your surplus of salt have nothing that you do not have, but they lack

^{viii} See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1950), 42–43 (§15).

other things which you cannot supply but will get from a source C. In order to overcome this difficulty, men introduced money: money first in the uncoined form, valuable metals, and then finally in the coin form. This is no difficulty, but money opens up a possibility which runs counter to the natural acquisitive art.

Student: Wasn't the possibility always there before money was even thought of?

LS: Yes. That was one of the points [. . .] more concrete terms. There is assumed we have secure property rights, which is a necessary condition, I suppose, for amassing wealth. But what will you do? You have now five hundred cows and you would like to have five thousand.

Same Student: What I was specifically talking about here was [. . .]

LS: In barter. Profit as profit is not here the theme. The question is infinity of the accumulation. The point is this. If you have things—commodities proper, things of use—there is a limit beyond which the accumulation⁹ causes only trouble. Think of the cows and ever more cows: How much land would you need? How many cowboys would you need? On the other hand, to accumulate gold, that is simple: you can dig a hole in the ground and put in more and more.

Same Student: On a similarly reasonable level, taking a person who lives out in the country and has a certain amount of land and assuming they have a limited amount of time even though their desires were unlimited, and they both have equal resources, it would seem very likely that even before there were coins that he could spend most of his time and energy amassing land and cattle and accumulating slaves to take care of the land he has.

LS: But there would nevertheless be a limit beyond which this is simply not feasible, where he would become so much dependent on the cowboys or slaves it simply wouldn't work.

Same Student: It's the same thing with money, though.

LS: Not quite, because it is much smaller in bulk.

Same Student: No, but to accumulate the money you have to do all these other things.

LS: But much less, much less. The danger of that exists but it is much easier to hide away, say, a million in gold than a million in land or a million in cattle. Also, it cannot be burned. You could have very valuable clothes. These can be burned.

Same Student: It seems that all money does is make it a bit easier. Even though it would be hard to do it, let's put it this way. Would the difficulties of attempting to spend your life in accumulating unlimited wealth, would the difficulties in having to do it in land and cattle prevent a man?

LS: You are speaking now of avarice as such. Aristotle doesn't speak about avarice here. He

speaks only of the possibility of an unnatural way. Aristotle would not deny, I think, that you can¹⁰ be avaricious even on the basis of a purely natural economy. Then be a miser with your food as well as with your money.

Same Student: It seems in the simplest form that its criticism of the unnatural form of acquisition is that it has an improper end: merely an accumulation of the size of wealth, rather than supplying the art of housing.

LS: All right. But in [. . .] terms, it offers essentially such a temptation. That is what Aristotle says. Natural property in his sense does not essentially offer such temptation, which doesn't mean that if a man is sufficiently corrupted, he may [not] also make it a temptation.

Same Student: But it would seem that the essential temptation comes not from the different relative ease of collecting money or cattle, but from the enormous and unlimited desire or anxiety about livelihood.

LS: This is what Aristotle says.

Same Student: Oh, I know. But I'm using that to say—

LS: But still the question is, nevertheless: Is there no difference between the objects? One kind of object is more conducive to that than the other. When you take, for example [. . .] that when Locke in his fifth chapter speaks of property, he says the same thing. Infinity of the desire comes in fact in with the money.

Same Student. But¹¹ his argument was that there was a natural limit because you could only have enough that wouldn't spoil. He doesn't seem to consider, say, the possibility of land or reproductive animals.

LS: Locke, and in this respect agreeing with Aristotle, says you would never have these enormous expansions of the desire for having things without money. It doesn't have to be coined money, but the things which have the function of money.

Same Student: It just seems that, in the [. . .] the difference which the facility which money provides, i.e., easy storage and so on, wouldn't be the decisive factor in determining whether a man is going to devote his whole life to this unnatural form.

LS: What do you mean? Even in a money economy there are people who are not misers, but the question is whether avarice does not come into its own—although there is a rudimentary form of avarice even among children and presumably also in very simple, non-money societies.

Same Student: It may well be that the conditions under which the vice is full blown, but it seems especially when Aristotle is saying what's natural, the ends of the art.

LS: But the point is this:¹² what is natural strictly speaking has a limit, and here there is a desire

which is limitless. If you take self-preservation, Aristotle would say if you think only of preserving life and forget completely about the good life, then there is something wrong with you. Which kind of corruption? What is the relation between these two kinds of corruption? The desire for self-preservation at all costs and the desire to amass as much gold and silver. That Aristotle does not state explicitly; we would have to figure it out. They are two different things, but two related things.

Same Student: For Aristotle, then, there's no affirmation collecting let's say two hundred pairs of shoes while everybody else is going without shoes. As long as it is shoes and it has a use value, and not collecting shoes for barter, for exchange value.

LS: But if you think of that fellow who collects two hundred pairs of shoes in order to wear every day another pair of shoes and no one else has any shoes, that is manifestly a crazy fellow. If you take a man who amasses money, and if he has a million, he would like to have two million, that is not in this obvious sense crazy. From a very high level it is as crazy, but not because he can give a reason for it, whereas this has no reason. Why should he? He cannot possibly wear two hundred pairs of shoes, not in his whole life.

Same Student: No, but [. . .] use value; after I wear a pair of shoes, I wear them once and throw them away.

LS: All right. But you must really ask yourself, or perhaps also this fellow whether what he does makes sense. And¹³ the point is that the moneymaker has an argument that stands up much better than the shoe collector. I mean, if he were to collect shoes because he is a student of human fashion as a shoe salesman, that would be another story. But we must go on.

Student: Am I correct in assuming that the unnaturalness of collecting money exists to the degree that there is a differential between its value as money and as a commodity? Is that correct?

LS: Yes, there is a difference.

Same Student: So in this case, which I think was the case in Aristotle's time, when we had what economists would call a full-bodied money—that is, a coin had a commodity use equivalent to its money use—then there is no unnaturalness of money.

LS: That's a point which Aristotle is going to make very soon.

Same Student: May I go on then to Mr. [. . .]'s point then?¹⁴ Does it become appropriate to accumulate wealth in that when one acquires a real level of wealth, one's aspiration level is moved forward? If you start with nothing and you say it is appropriate to acquire a certain amount of wealth and more is avarice, when you reach that level, it then would seem that to acquire a higher level . . .

LS: Oh, but that is not true, because it *seems*, you say. In other words, a man who starts out with not a cent in his pocket and after a year he has acquired, perhaps by selling newspapers,

fifty dollars, that's terrific for him. But once he has the fifty dollars, he would like to have five hundred, and so on. It appears to him differently, and even if he has acquired a million, it appears to him not yet enough. Surely it appears to him, but we have to distinguish between appearance and truth, and we can say as long as he tries to get sufficient money to be sure to be able to pay not only his next rent, but say for the whole year, then it makes sense; but if he wishes to provide for a number of generations of his offspring, then it becomes insanity.

Same Student: However one acquires this wealth, his standard of living rises. For instance, if he has better shoes . . .

LS: But the question is whether that is sensible, whether one should always improve one's standard of living. That is a notion of comfortable self-preservation, as John Locke^{ix} so beautifully recalled¹⁵. You not only want to have food for keeping body and soul together, but you want to have it nicely spiced with the right kind of sauces and the proper kind of thing for each season of the year. That can go on infinitely. But such an individual you would call a glutton, and you would say he doesn't know what it means to live as a human being. He may be a nice fellow, and especially when he takes you out to a restaurant and gives you excellent advice as to what to take, you would appreciate that, but still you would have to say in a way his life is a wasted life because he puts his end into something which doesn't deserve to be that. That is elementary, not only for Aristotle but for most thinking people, at least in former times. I'm sure today, perhaps since the emergence of modern economics, that has greatly changed, I have been given to understand. Let us first see whether that makes any sense to you. In the sequel, 1257b.

Reader: 1257b, Article 10.

Indeed wealth is often assumed to consist of a quantity of money, because money is the thing with which business and trade are employed. But at other times, on the contrary, it is thought that money is nonsense, and entirely a convention but by nature nothing, because when those who use it have changed the currency it is worth nothing, and because it is of no use for any of the necessary needs of life and a man well supplied with money may often be destitute of the bare necessities of subsistence, yet it is absurd that wealth should be of such a kind that a man may be well supplied with it and yet die of hunger, like the famous Midas in the story, when owing to the insatiable covetousness of his prayer all the viands served up to him turned into gold. (1257b8-18)

LS: You see here that's Aristotle's kind of proof that this kind of wealth is not natural: you may possess it and starve. That kind of thing cannot be wealth proper. And also the depreciation of the currency: a mere whim of the legislator transforms wealth into non-wealth. That is not natural wealth.

Student: But in fact we know, if we study monetary history, that [at] that time there was no fiat money. That money had a full commodity value. It is true that Aristotle implies by wealth some minimal standard of living, which he says on the basis of subjective judgment . . .

^{ix} Locke, *First Treatise of Government*, chap. 9, sec. 87.

LS: Only since you are sitting on your high horse that we today know how you interpret [. . .] the uses change. It is no longer worth anything nor useful for any necessity, so in spite of what your economic historian told you, there must have been such a thing such as change in the value [of] money.

Student: In other words, Aristotle discerned the fiat quality of money by reflecting [. . .]

LS: I remember now in Xenophon's *Ways and Means* there is a discussion of inflation, so they were aware of these kinds of fluctuations.^x

Student: It would seem to me that we seem to beat around one bush, and this was raised by the statement made by Mr. [. . .], which may have been improvement . . . that is, the question of natural right to a subsistence. The question¹⁶ was raised before and it's been raised again in various indirect ways, and that is regarding the naturalness of acquisition. How much is it right for man to acquire when, as a result of acquisition, other men can't acquire that which is necessary to run their households?

LS: That is a question which—you have to go into details. In order to settle such a question, we must have the right kind of regime. In an oligarchy [. . .] the wealthy as wealthy rule, and men concerned with having wealth and increasing their wealth, you will never get such a law. In a democracy, there are other difficulties according to Aristotle, as we will find. You might get a law to milk the rich rather easily; but it is not quite as simple, because in ancient democracy the majority of citizens were of course property owners and they understood the danger of interfering with property rights quite well. So it would require a city—a state, let us say—ruled by wise men. All right. Then it could be said that they would take care of that, and as in Plato's *Republic* there's a beautiful example: the moneymakers are completely disfranchised. That's all right, and only the soldiers and let us say the civil servants, maybe—they are full citizens, although the true decisionmakers are of course the one or two men at the top. That is possible. But it also has its drawbacks, as Aristotle is not slow to point out in book 2. One would have to lay the framework for that. There are laws possible of this kind, for example, that everyone who has a fortune more than [a given amount] should be exiled and can take his property with him. That is what the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse decided once in a given case, because he felt that man makes too much [. . .] but Dionysius, who had an atom of decency left although he was a tyrant, didn't take away the property as a modern tyrant would but exiled him. That's possible. But I do not see your precise point.

Same Student: The point is that it seems to be implicit in the discussion of natural acquisition a statement regarding a limit upon the amount of wealth a man may naturally or justly accumulate, and the just accumulation of wealth relates to the amount of wealth which is taken from others.

LS: Yes. There would be nothing except the practical difficulty, because what might be the upper limit, say, in dollars and cents now, might on account of fluctuation of the currency not be the sound maximum ten years from now. But the main point Aristotle¹⁷ will discuss¹⁸ when we come to

^x Xenophon, *Ways and Means, or On Revenues*, trans. Wayne Ambler, in *The Shorter Writings*, ed. Gregory McBrayer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), ch. 5.

the question of why should there be private property at all, and that is the critique [. . .] of book 2.

Student: I think the difference underlying what Mr. [. . .]'s getting at and what the book has is the natural limit on the individual himself, which the book is looking at, and he's raising the social question. And this doesn't touch the unfortunate case: there may not be enough to go around so that everyone can live decently. And Aristotle's only attacking the mild—if this is an attack on wealth-getting, it's only an attack on wealth-getting beyond need.

LS: I see. Is this the point? Aristotle takes for granted, without it even being discussed, that there will always be an economy of scarcity. Is this the point?

Student: It seems to me that Mr. [. . .]'s suggesting just the opposite.

LS: Oh, no. You cannot find any evidence for that, because he takes it so much for granted. It goes without saying. To speak with the Bible, there will always be the poor with you—poor in the ordinary sense, paupers. They are not only people who have to earn their living, which is what Aristotle ordinarily understands by a poor man, but paupers there will always be; and something must be done, surely, but¹⁹ somehow the city has²⁰ to do [something] about it in order to protect itself against disturbances of public peace and what have you. A rather hardheaded, not to say hardhearted view. That is clear. In other words, the *polis* has no obligation to take care of the inevitable poverty of a considerable part of the population. They must do it [themselves]. They should work; and if that cannot be done, then they should be sent out as colonists to an unoccupied place, maybe in Sicily, maybe in Asia Minor. These are the points. In other words, what now would be called the social policy plays a relatively small role in Plato and Aristotle.

Student: When you look at it in terms of the individual rather than the social policy, corporization of individuals may result from the accumulation of wealth, so it's not simply a matter of whether you talk about the natural . . .

LS: Then make a maximum of the property which can be owned by individuals. That is the thing which would occur immediately, and something of this kind is [. . .] but let us wait until we come to the second book. There are such proposals discussed. A point which is also made in this neighborhood here concerns usually this famous passage, 1258a38 following. This we should really read.

Reader:

But, as we said, this art is twofold—

LS: Namely, the acquisitive art.

Reader:

one branch being of the nature of trade while the other belongs to the household art; and the latter branch is necessary and in good esteem, but the branch connected with exchange is justly discredited— (1258a38-41)

LS: Justly blamed. They always prefer the paler word to the more forceful word. I don't know why, but I think they regard it as more academic. Anemic.

Reader:

for it is not in accordance with nature, but involves men's taking things from one another—

LS: Yes, now that is badly translated. The natural art of acquisition takes from nature: take the simple case of hunting and fishing, but also agriculture and so on. But there is a kind of acquiring which takes from other human beings, and that is unnatural. Therefore the trader gets his money not directly through cooperating with nature but through getting his wealth through other human beings.

Student: It seems a [. . .] does have something to do with it.

LS: No [. . .] is not around. Does not Aristotle speak of robbery, of piracy as a natural form of wealth-getting? So that is slightly a bit more complicated. He uses here the terms praising and blaming, which this translator doesn't bring out. Does Barker bring it out?

Student: Barker has "censure."

LS: You know, there is something of *nomos*, of certain not-evidently plausible evaluations involved. The robber, the highway robber or pirate does not say thank you. He's a free man. He takes it; whereas the trader is in a kind of [. . .] dependence on his customers. That is degrading. That is what these gentlemen mean, and not only the gentlemen. This is still intelligible. Of course, I don't say that is wise [. . .] Let us now finish this passage.

Reader:²¹

justly censured, because the gain in which it results is not naturally made, but is made at the expense of other men.—^{xi}

LS: From other men, but with this interpretation: inner dependence on man, because otherwise the robbery would be still worse than trading. There is a kind of Greek equivalent to feudal morality, which looked down on trade but did not mind highway robbery.

Reader:

The trade of the petty usurer is hated most, and with most reason.^{xii}

LS: But also of the big one, not only the petty. That is, as we say, a bow to the bankers.

Reader:

The trade of usurers is hated most, and with most reason: it makes a profit from currency itself, instead of making it from the process which currency was meant to serve. Currency came into existence merely as a means of exchange; usury tries to make it increase. This is the reason why

^{xi} Barker translation.

^{xii} Barker translation.

usury is called by the word we commonly use [the word *tokos*, ‘offspring’]; for as the offspring resembles its parent, so the interest bred by money is like the principal which breeds it—^{xiii} (1258b2-6)

LS: Interest is the offspring of the capital.

Reader:

[so] it may be called ‘currency the son of currency.’ Hence we can understand why, of all modes of acquisition, usury is the most unnatural.^{xiv}

LS: Now this had an infinite history, and it took whole railway cars of literature until this [. . .] usually which was taken over by the Church was disposed of starting in the sixteenth century, and this [. . .] was settled then, I suppose, by the end of the seventeenth.

[. . .] another statement from classical antiquity [. . .] where a man says it is unjust that money should increase merely by virtue of the flux of time. This man has a hundred dollars from you. You have a hundred dollars and then you loan it to him; and you don’t do anything with it, but merely because a year has passed you have one hundred twenty dollars. So only time has increased it, without any other thing, and that is something unjust. Now the beginning of the next passage, which indicates again the distinction between the gentlemen and the philosopher.

Reader: 1258b, Article 1.

Since we have adequately defined the scientific side of the subject, we ought to discuss it from the point of view of practice; although, whereas the theory of such matters is a liberal study, the practical pursuit of them is narrowing.^{xv} (1258b9-12)

LS: That is a reasonable translation. So in other words, if you study these things of how to acquire money through horses, through cows, through mining, that can be respectable; but to engage in it, that is not the proper thing to do. We have spoken of this before.

I would like to say a word about this difficulty which Aristotle discusses at some length at the end of the chapter. The problem was stated quite well by Mr. [. . .] and Mr. [. . .]. Must the slave have virtue? The difficulty is this. If he must have virtue, why is he not a free man? But if he does not have virtue, what is his use as a slave—for example, if he doesn’t have virtue, if he’s always drunk and always quarrels? Now Aristotle, in order to settle this question, says the virtue of a being depends on the character of their being, on the essence of their being, and this is true also of the kinds of various human beings. Therefore the virtue of a wife, of a woman, differs in kind from the virtue of a man. And he gives this example: silence becomes a woman. It does not become, in this simple way, a man. A man must be able to speak in public, which in Athens would have been regarded as the utmost dissoluteness [if done by a woman]. You know Aspasia of course could never do that; she was a foreigner, but she was regarded as a very dubious individual—apparently a highly intelligent woman, but she did things which a

^{xiii} Barker translation.

^{xiv} Barker translation.

^{xv} The reader returns here to the Rackham translation.

nice lady wouldn't do, and she talked too much to men who were not her husbands.^{xvi} But to stand up in public and to speak, that would be unbearable. Also, if a woman would have the courage of a paratrooper, that would also be shocking for other reasons, but if the paratrooper would have that kind of courage which a courageous woman has, he would be an impossible paratrooper. In other words, it depends on the natural function of the being concerned. Also regarding the children, the kind of courage, justice, etc., [or] prudence you can reasonably expect from a child differs from that which you can reasonably expect from a grown-up man or woman. And the application to slaves: there is a kind of slave's virtue which has certain similarities or semblances to the free man's virtues, but which is fundamentally different.

So the difficulty is this. Now let us take a craftsman, an example discussed by Aristotle. Does a craftsman need virtue—I mean, apart from that virtue which is in his art? That's a purely intellectual virtue, but we are speaking now of moral virtue. Aristotle says: Hardly. The slave needs some moral virtue. Why? Because he lives in your house, and if he is not housebroken, it would be absolutely impossible. But the craftsman may lead the most dissolute life he wants, but if the knives or the pots or whatever he makes are well made, he's a good artist; so that we arrive at this strange situation, but very characteristic of Aristotle's way of thinking: that apparently the free man—a certain kind of free man, the craftsman, artists—need less moral virtue than the slaves. That has nothing to do with any confusion in Aristotle's mind; on the contrary, on his amazing quality which he has perhaps more than any other philosopher of thinking out each problem on its own terms, and shying away from sweeping assertions which obfuscate the subtle differences between the various kinds of things.

Now in this section here—give it a few more minutes, because we cannot always have two meetings on the same assignment, because otherwise we will never come through the *Politics*, and I promised to myself and to the class that we will [. . .] But one question which was in your mind and is I believe also in the mind of others, concerning men and women, of which he speaks here also. Now what is the trouble with women according to Aristotle? What he suggests is this. A child is subject to paternal authority, and even parental authority, for the simple reason²² [that] he lacks the experience enabling him to guide his life. He might think that it is a perfectly harmless thing to start smoking, and he must be told by his elders that it is a very foolish habit. And he cannot yet know it: he must believe that it is foolish and he will regret it if he becomes an addict. But what about the wife, assuming that she is of course a sensible wife? She has the experience; that is not the point. What she lacks is the firmness of purpose in regard to desires and passions. That is the point. So she sees very well that it is foolish; she has experience enough to see the folly of becoming enamored of this particular hat, say, this particular hat, and yet she cannot fight the temptation. Taking equals, a correspondingly sensible man would not succumb to this kind of temptation. And that is Aristotle's point, and whether that is right or is based on an absurd prejudice, that is of course a long question.

^{xvi} Aspasia was a native of Miletus and a resident alien in Athens, which meant that she was not bound by the legal restraints that confined Athenian women to their homes and was able to participate in public life in Athens. After Pericles divorced his wife, Aspasia lived with him and they had a son, also named Pericles. See especially Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*.

But let us discuss a question for one moment on the highest level, of which one must always think when reading a thinker like Aristotle, and that is thinking in the highest sense, what is traditionally called philosophy. Now²³ Plato, as you know, demanded equality of the two sexes because he said there is no greater difference between males and females than between a bald-headed and a not-bald-headed man.^{xvii} I suppose he referred to the fact that women usually have more hair on their heads than men. This I think is an overstatement, because there are other differences which are not politically irrelevant. Now in the first place, in politics [one thing is] crucial, and that is this: there was always war. Hardly a generation passed in which a city was not in warfare. Whether this has changed in our age I leave to the judgment of every one of you. In war, the warriors were in Greece universally male, and the women were not warriors. The reason was this, I believe—apart from the fact that there is an average difference in strength, that is not the [. . .] reason. The [. . .] reason is this: that for the preservation of the city and for the future the women are much less replaceable than the men, because generating a child is a much [. . .] process than bearing it. A man can fertilize quite a few women within a short time, whereas on the other hand [with women] the situation is very different. That is one point.

Then you have the male armies. Then there is the simple reasoning—we have to reconstruct that, because no one argued that out at that time, except Plato alludes to these things in the *Republic*—which I remember from President Eisenhower: who is old enough to fight is old enough to vote.^{xviii} I don't believe that is a wise principle, but it is intelligible and [. . .] plausible for many people. Now those who do the fighting must have greater political rights than those who never do the fighting, so the only full citizens are males.

That is all on the political [. . .] and now we turn to what Aristotle regards as the highest: thinking. Now one can say on the political level, to say a word about that [. . .] and make a transition: we find from time to time women who are very good not only as businesswomen, but also in politics, and God knows how many senators and governors derive the most valuable part of their wisdom from their own wives—and I'm not thinking now of Governor Wallace.^{xix} There are the famous cases: Queen Victoria, Elizabeth I—

Student: Marie-Thérèse, surely.

LS: Compared with her husband, surely. And Catherine the Great of Russia, and the Greeks knew quite a few stories, true or false, of [. . .] and whatever. So women play their role, but if you look at the history of philosophy, what do you find there?

Student: Males.

LS: Only men. Well, I made this point a few decades ago, once in a small college, but a good

^{xvii} *Republic* 454b ff.

^{xviii} See President Dwight D. Eisenhower's State of the Union Address, January 7, 1954.

^{xix} Lurleen Burns Wallace, wife of Alabama Governor George Wallace, ran for the gubernatorial office in 1966 because a constitutional two-term limit prohibited her husband from seeking re-election. She served as Alabama governor from 1967 until her death in 1968.

college, and then the professor in whose class I gave the lecture said: Oh, but you forgot Susan Stebbing.^{xx} And I could only say: Oh, I forgot entirely about her. So in general there is something, and I believe Aristotle and Plato would have what they now call a theory for that: that if we consider the primary difference of the two sexes and their function in human life, the most obvious one is the bearing of children and everything going with that, the woman being much closer to the earth. We speak of Mother Earth—never Father Earth—and Heavenly Father. Therefore there is this possibility of “abstractedness.”²⁴ [That] is perhaps by nature more easily to be found in the male sex, which does not mean, of course, as Aristotle makes clear, that every husband is superior to his wife. That is frequently of course not the case, and Aristotle says: Well, that is a kind of natural mischief. Nature would wish to do that, to have in each case a superior husband and a wife inferior—not simply, but often she fails, and it is the good fortune for the husband if he has a brighter wife.

Student: [. . .] if the female were given added conveniences to enable her to have the leisure time with which to contemplate, then you might have more female philosophers . . .

LS: If the natural way of generating children is not changed by producing children in test tubes, for which there is very little chance as far as I know,^{xxi} then this fundamental difficulty . . .

Same Student: But it is only nine months . . .

LS: But there are other things, there are [. . .] And apart from that, the question arises [that] there are certain other qualities that go with this fundamental difference. And²⁵ certain feminine, I do not say female, but feminine qualities, and the question is whether these feminine qualities are not affected by the masculinization of the way of life of women. That might be a very important consideration. I have not the right to judge a matter of such importance, but I think we must be open-minded.

Student: I think my basic objection with what Aristotle is saying is that it’s so natural [. . .]

LS: In the first place, no convention made the male the generator and the female the bearer. Connected with this, that the fighting is done by males and not by females—except in Israel and such other places, but as a rule not, and which is also not a mere accident—and this is forming the character of the two sexes and their diversities. Surely I hope you don’t believe that I want the abolition of females in political life. That would be much too [. . .] today.

^{xx} (Lizzie) Susan Stebbing (1885–1943), British analytic philosopher.

^{xxi} The first child to be conceived through IVF was born in 1978.

Session 5: October 16, 1967
Book 2, chapters 7–12

Leo Strauss: Now I first would like to bring up only two or three points. What in your opinion is the most interesting section of today's assignment?ⁱ

Student: I found the discussion of the proposals more interesting than the discussion of the constitutions.

LS: What do you mean by the distinction?

Same Student: The proposals of [. . .] and the proposals of Phaleas. Especially the proposals of Phaleas, because in this discussion . . .

LS: Oh, you mean the proposed polities rather than the actual polities. That is a sensible answer. Now the other point I would like to raise is this. At the beginning you spoke of the comparative character of Aristotle's studies. What is comparative here?

Same Student: He discusses both the proposals and the constitutions, and there are certain recurring elements that he brings up, namely, the question of whether or not lack of necessities is a dominant consideration in constitution making. He discusses the role of the leisure class in the *polis*.

LS: But what is comparative about that? I mean, he is confronted with a variety of regimes, either merely proposed or in actual practice, and he discusses each of them with a view to the question: Is it good or is it bad? There is nothing comparative. Comparative would be, say, if you took all available or the most important available and compare them among themselves, and the comparison as comparison is meant to throw light; but here the comparison as comparison is, to the extent to which it occurs, strictly subordinate to the question to see whether it is good and what its effects are. I think you were right in saying that of the available constitutions the Carthaginian is the best. That is also my impression.

On the contrary, the normative concern of Aristotle is quite striking. In one passage to which you referred, when he gives the causal explanation of a certain defect of the Spartan regime, he said: Well, this is a good excuse, that through their warlike life the Spartans couldn't take care of their women, and so this is a good excuse for them. But we are not concerned here with finding excuses but establishing the fact that the arrangement is bad. The question of a causal explanation, how to explain an error or other thing, comes up only after it has been established that it was a defect, and that is a most important consideration. One must avoid the mistake of bringing Aristotle very close to what is today called social or political science.

ⁱ Strauss addresses a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

We will take up this question especially in book 5, when Aristotle discusses tyranny, and quite a few people have said: Well, here you have Machiavelli. We will see that we do not have Machiavelli. What Machiavelli knew Aristotle knew also, but Aristotle knew some other things which Machiavelli did not see very clearly.

Now let us first turn to the beginning, that is Phaleas, 1266a, the beginning of today's assignment. Let us read only the first sentence.

Reader: 1266a, Article 1.

There are also certain other regimes,ⁱⁱ some drawn up by amateurs¹— (1266a31)

LS: By laymen. In Greek, idiots; idiocy, because originally it had not the meaning it has now, but that of laymen.

Student: Well, by private persons . . .

LS: All right, you can say private persons, but then you have to go on.

Reader:

and others by philosophers and statesmen—

LS: So in other words, philosophers are not then private men. Why not? Are they necessarily rulers or something of this kind? Or political men?

Student: They belong not just to themselves but to the cosmos.

LS: To something common, whether the common is a *polis*, as in the case of the statesmen, or whether the common is the universe is another [. . .] The idiot is concerned with the non-common, which is even true of the idiot in the present-day sense of the term.

Reader:

but all of them are nearer to those which have been actually established and by which cities are governed at present than are both of those which have been considered. (1266a31-33)

LS: So in other words, that is clear. The following regimes either [. . .] or in actual[ity] do not suffer from that grave defect on which especially Plato's *Republic* suffers. It runs counter to everything we know as actual.

Now the first man is then Phaleas of Chalcedon, and he thought the cure-all would be equality of possession. Aristotle discusses [. . .] Now we have read Aristotle's criticism of Plato's communism. Aristotle is in favor of private property; we know that. But what is the difference between Aristotle and John Locke, to mention one of the most famous protagonists of private property in modern times, regarding property?

ⁱⁱ Rackham has "constitutional schemes."

Student: For Locke, property is prepolitical, and Aristotle asserts that private property will be good because then the citizens will take better care of it.

LS: The household is in a way also prepolitical. That's not the point.

Student: Locke supports the unlimited acquisition of private property, and Aristotle . . .

LS: Yes. Aristotle is concerned with what they would call static property and not the indefinite or infinite acquisition of property—what they would now call dynamic, I suppose. So Aristotle does not admit an unqualified right to increase one's property. If the city sets up a limit of what a man can acquire, that is not only acceptable to Aristotle but even demanded by him. We must never forget that. Now let us turn to 1266b29, where the chief objection to Phaleas is.

Reader:

Even if one prescribed a moderate property for all, it would be of no avail, since it is more needful to level men's desires than their properties, and this can only be done by an adequate system of education enforced by law.

LS: If they are not sufficiently educated by the laws, the system isn't there and quite a few other things aren't there. So that is clear. Aristotle, in other words, while he is in favor of a limitation of what a man can possess or acquire, the decisive point is not these external limitations but the character of men. A little bit later, 1266b38.

Reader:

Civil strife is caused not only by inequality of property, but also by inequality of honors, though the two motives operate in opposite ways—the masses—

LS: The masses [. . .] something terrible. There are no masses. I mean, there was neither a doctrine of the mass of perdition as in Christian theology, nor Newtonian masses, so [. . .] many; and in addition the numbers of people concerned were so small that the expression "the masses" is a bit absurd.

Reader:

the many are discontented if possessions are unequally distributed, the fewⁱⁱⁱ—

LS: The few, the nice men—

Student: The gentlemen?

LS: [. . .] is something different. The nice ones . . .

Reader:

if honors are equally distributed, bringing it about that 'Noble or base in the like honor

ⁱⁱⁱ Rackham has "the upper classes."

stand.' Nor do men do wrong for the sake of the bare necessities only— (1266b38-1267a3)

LS: In other words, as one doctrine says, if people have sufficient food, shelter, and so on, no one would commit a crime—a doctrine which one hears from time to time even today, and Aristotle's objection you will hear now.

Reader:

the sort of wrongdoing for which Phaleas thinks that equality of substance is a cure—preventing highway robbery by removing the motive of cold or hunger; men also do wrong to gain pleasure and to satisfy desire. For if they have desire above the bare necessities of existence, they will transgress to cure this desire; and moreover not because of desire only, but in order that they may enjoy the pleasures that are not associated with pains. (1267a3-7)

LS: What does this mean, where the not-having as such is painful? I mean hunger, not having food, is painful. But there are other things where the not-having as such is not painful, but it may become painful by a secondary consideration, because Mr. [. . .] has got it. But that is not forever in the nature of the thing concerned but because of looking at other people.

Reader:

What remedy is there then for these three classes of offenses? For the first class, a modest competence and work—

LS: Meaning for those who suffer from the necessities, from lack of necessities.

Reader:

for the second, temperance; and as for the third sort, any people who desired pleasures depending on themselves could seek no cure for their desires save that which is derived from philosophy, for the other pleasures require the aid of fellow-creatures. Since clearly the greatest transgressions spring from a desire for superfluities, not for bare necessities (for example, men do not become tyrants in order to avoid shivering with cold, and accordingly high honors are awarded to one who kills a tyrant, but not to one who kills a thief); so that the method of the constitution of Phaleas is efficacious only against the minor social disorders. (1267a9-16)

LS: That is clear, therefore the belief that equality of property as such would be the cure is absurd.

Student: There are two questions I have. In the first place, it would seem by the statement that the solution of what Aristotle considers the minor problem of crime, some modicum of property and some sort of work is the answer. Now does this imply that Aristotle would favor the redistribution of property if this would be the necessary action to achieve the goal?

LS: Yes, he would. But there is a great difficulty. The great difficulty is change, and that he will discuss in the following section. But in the case the legislator has his hand free, as in the case of a newly-founded colony, by all means; but if you have a society which is already old

and established, then change becomes a difficult question, as we will discuss in the next chapter. But you had a two-point question.

Same Student: I don't know enough about the social history of Greece, but it . . .

LS: Neither do I.

Same Student: But it would seem to me that—well, I can't quite believe the assertion that the greatest number of crimes comes from the desire for, let's say, luxury or pleasure rather than out of necessity.

LS: What is the greatest crime?

Same Student: If people speak of lawlessness, this is a great problem in society. If there is general lawlessness, it means lawlessness is distributed generally in society, which means² crimes committed by the many rather than simply by the few.

LS: But that is really a question. Why should not black sheep—sons of the nice ones—why should they not also be criminals? Aristotle was not so unfair as not to know that, but for example, take really big criminals. Now in Aristotle's time, or shortly before his time, who was generally regarded as the most terrible criminals, say, like Cesare Borgia in modern times? [Critias], from a very noble family and a large scale murderer—of course he was a ruler at the time, but illegitimate ruler—and [Alcibiades] and the misery he brought on Athens through his Sicilian expedition. Speaking now quite superficially but [. . .] would be newspaper headings—so an ordinary fellow, poor fellow who murders, for what reason? In order to get a next meal? He doesn't have to murder for that; ordinary robbery, or breaking and entering, might do. But if someone would murder because someone has taken away his wife or girl, that is already something not quite so, you know—it's a more excusable homicide, I think even today. In other words, the really terrible things are the tyrants, and no one becomes a tyrant because he shivers and wants to have a pleasant warmth in his room. One has entirely different motives in order to become a tyrant. Therefore, that is what Aristotle means. He speaks of that. Crimes committed in order to avoid hunger and shivering and other things are not politically the most important crimes. Now if you have a large part of the city that hungers and shivers, that is surely a political problem, and something must be done about it. There are various things which can be done about it; for example, one is disfranchisement—I mean, we must bust the case wide open and not argue merely on the basis of the now-accepted principle. That's one way of doing it. If they have no right to vote, their political power or possibilities are much more limited obviously than if [. . .] We have to [. . .] the material yet in order to decide that. I would only like to intimate possibilities which Aristotle takes more seriously than they would be taken today.

Student: I have a question similar to Mr. [. . .]'s and also to your answer. Is the basis for Aristotle's distinction of what Barker translates as civil discord^{iv} versus ordinary crime—

^{iv} The student refers to the phrase that had been translated as “civil strife” above, since the reader read the passage from the Rackham and not the Barker translation.

LS: “Civil discord” is a weak translation. The Greek word is *stasis*, or the word derived from that. You can translate it by [. . .] revolution, but revolution is not a Greek term; that comes from much later. Rebellion would be better; or still better, something like a riot, a riot with its ordinary accompaniments like killing and looting.

Same Student: Is this distinction a qualitative one or a quantitative one, between *stasis*³ and ordinary crime? The reason I raise this question is because from the point of view of some in the ghetto insurrections of the past four years,^v they are clearly a rebellion or a civil discord, whereas from the point of view of others they are just a large instance of crime in the streets. So is this [. . .] of numbers of people—

LS: No, there is a difference in kind. There is a nice discussion of that, as I happened to remember, in Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution*. There were hunger strikes in Russia in ’17. They were just poor women whose husbands were [. . .] or at the front, and they couldn’t buy the bread anymore. That was one thing, but from a certain moment on it became political; that is to say, the people who made the riots were no longer concerned merely with getting bread but felt it was necessary to have a radical political change in order to get bread, among other things.^{vi}

Same Student: Then the distinction seems to turn on the motives of the people, whereas we may have a situation where people are “rioting” for very numerous reasons, and to them it might not be political, but it is defined by the authorities as a political threat.

LS: That depends. You know sometimes the authorities regard something as political which is not political. They may err. They may also not believe it and prefer to say so because more severe action can be taken if it is political than if it is nonpolitical. That depends. But it [. . .] an⁴ [essential] difference, and I would say I think even the rioters themselves must be very dumb people if they do not know that from a certain moment the emphasis has shifted merely from complaining about rats in tenement houses to demanding a radical political change.

Same Student: Yes, except in empirical studies of rebellions and revolutions in streets [. . .] study the French Revolution show at the time in the minds of people it was simply a great hunger strike, or a strike for bread had immense political implications. It is not always clear at what point . . .

LS: Sure, but there will always be some individuals, be it only one in a thousand, who intend merely more than a hunger strike, and only the percentage will change in the course of time. Say, in 1789, there were only a very few people who wanted to abolish the monarchy in

^v In the late 1960s a large number of urban riots took place in American cities, including Los Angeles in 1965, and the “long hot summer” of 1967 which saw 159 riots, the most serious of which took place in Detroit and Newark.

^{vi} Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2008), chap. 36, 611

France, but in 1790 that looked completely different: there was a much higher percentage. That is hard to distinguish, the distinction between potential and actual in such situations.

Same Student: Right. But what I want to make sure is Aristotle's distinction for whether an act is political or not depends on the motive of the people engaging in the act. Is that correct?

LS: Let us say on what the purpose of the act is.

Same Student: From the point of the people.

LS: Not necessarily; the purpose does not have to be fully conscious. Aristotle doesn't say anything here about how to find out that. If one made use of a Marxist distinction, it may be objectively political and yet subjectively for many people still merely a hunger riot, so that only a further development of the rioting can make clear to everybody concerned that mere rioting or looting of bakery shops will not do. That is not so difficult. I think it is wrong to look at it from the point of view of what a public opinion researcher might find out about it. People frequently don't know what they want, and yet it is in them; and whether it will become actualized [. . .] depends on things which they themselves wouldn't know and which social scientists wouldn't know. It may be something in the air and which is discerned usually only by good noses and can smell, and [. . .] There is no difficulty. Aristotle did not look at political matters from the point of view of what by purely mechanical methods can be demonstrated or not, because that would be the end of political judgment. I think I can leave it at that. Now let us turn a little later to 1267a, the end of it.

Reader:

And also the baseness of human beings is a thing insatiable, and though at the first a dole of only two obols is enough, yet when this has now become an established custom, they always want more, until they get to an unlimited amount; for appetite is in its nature unlimited, and the majority of mankind live for the satisfaction of appetite. The starting-point in such matters therefore, rather than leveling estates, is to train those that are respectable by nature so that they may not wish for excessive wealth, and to contrive that the base may not be able to do so, and this is so^{vii} if they are kept inferior, but^{viii} not unjustly treated. (1267a42-b8)

LS: The reason I suggested that we read this passage is this: to make perfectly clear what Aristotle thought about the question: Is man by nature bad? Here we have the answer. Some are, some are not. As common sense would say, ordinary [. . .] he's a bad egg, and his brother is not a bad egg. They have the same environment—the same offspring—and yet there is this difference. So there are men that not only Plato and Aristotle think the same about, and I think quite a few people have thought [. . .] in all times including our own.

Student: This is not a question; I have a request to make. When you give the notation, it would help a great deal if you gave the notation in Barker. I have a great deal of difficulty following that notation . . .

^{vii} Rackham has "secured."

^{viii} Rackham has "while."

LS: All right.

Reader: If I could find my way to the Barker, I would be using the Barker.

LS: This much about Phaleas. And now let us turn to Hippodamus and read the very beginning.

Reader: 1267b, Article 1.

Hippodamus, son of Euryphon, a Milesian (who invented the division of cities into blocks and cut up Piraeus, and who also became somewhat eccentric in his general mode of life owing to a desire for distinction, so that some people thought that he lived too fussily, with a quantity of hair and expensive ornaments, and also a quantity of cheap yet warm clothes not only in winter but also in the summer periods, and who wished to be a man of learning in natural science generally), he^{ix} was the first man not engaged in politics who attempted to speak on the subject of the best form of regime.^x (1267b21-29)

LS: Now this man, he was the first not engaged in politics, meaning not actually a founder of a society, who wanted to speak about [. . .] To be a man not engaged in politics and desiring to speak about the best regime, that is the definition of the political philosopher. Since there is no distinction between political philosopher and political scientist here, we can also say he was the first political scientist. This we must consider to our proper humiliation. This was the first ancestor of our profession. Aristotle very rarely makes such remarks. When he speaks about a man, he doesn't go in for this kind of thing; and nowhere does he speak with this emphasis, so Aristotle obviously regarded this as an important point. You could say here, when he speaks of the long hair, you could think of a beatnik or a hippie, but this of course would be unfair to the beatniks or hippies because he did some other things which the hippies don't do. On the other hand, you may say he did not do certain things. He was a man who also was desirous to speak, to be regarded as competent regarding the whole of nature. That's important. It appears then from the sequel; the sequel, as Mr. [. . .] has shown, was a doctrine according to which all politically interesting things are to be divided into three. Now behind this in all probability is a scientific doctrine, a doctrine of nature which uses the number three as a key, as if it were the formula unlocking all the mysteries of the universe. His doctrine is one of wonderful simplicity and clarity, but what happens if you look at it more closely? Mr. [. . .], what does Aristotle find when he investigates Hippodamus's clear and simple proposal?

Student: He finds that it is unrealistic, because . . .

LS: No, that's a very wrong word. Aristotle uses another word quite a few times when he discusses this. For example, in 1268 b3 to 4. Barker gives the pages and subdivisions. From 3 to 4; that means it is very close to the beginning of 1268b. What does he say? "This all has [or is productive of—LS] great confusion,"^{xi} a term which occurs again a little bit later. The way of

^{ix} The reader adds "he," which is not included in the Rackham translation.

^x Rackham has "constitution."

^{xi} Strauss's translation.

judging clever cases which Hippodamus proposes is very confusing. In other words, in proportion as Hippodamus's proposal is very simple and clear, in the same proportion it will in effect be most confusing. That is the main point of the criticism of Hippodamus which Aristotle makes. Now let us turn to the next point, the more special point regarding Hippodamus in 1268b22.

Reader:

As for the view that an honor ought to be awarded to those who invent something advantageous to the city,^{xii} legislation to this effect is not safe, but only specious to the ear; for it involves malicious prosecutions and, it may even happen, constitutional upheavals. And the matter leads to another problem and a different inquiry: some persons raised the question whether to alter the traditional laws, supposing another law is better, is harmful or advantageous to cities. (1268b22-27)

LS: The first point is: Is it wise to give rewards to inventors as inventors? Today, of course, but for Aristotle and for quite a few people in later ages it was a question, because an invention, say, of great convenience might have political consequences. While we all know of technological unemployment today, this was not the question for Aristotle at that time, but the question of political changes, directly political changes [. . .] and therefore the question arises, the broader question: What about the change of political institutions and such? And in particular, what about the change of the ancestral laws? Go on.

Reader:

It is not easy to give a speedy agreement to the above proposal to honor reformers, if really it is disadvantageous to alter the laws; and a revolutionary legal or constitutional proposal in the interest of the community is quite possible. And since we have made mention of this question, it will be better if we set out a few further details about it, for, as we said, it involves difficulty. And it might be thought that it would be better for alteration to take place; at all events in the other fields of knowledge this has proved beneficial—for example, medicine has been improved by being altered from the traditional system, and gymnastic training, and in general all the arts and faculties; so that since statesmanship also is to be counted as one of these, it is clear that the same thing necessarily holds good in regard to it as well. And it might be said that a sign of this has occurred in the actual events of history— (1268b27-38)

LS: That is, of course, also terrible [. . .] but [it would be better translated as] “the facts” . . . But⁵ one can say [that] at the first reading of Aristotle it doesn't make any difference whether you translate it this way or that, but if we want to be a bit closer, we have to have a somewhat more exact translation. There is no word for history in this sense in Aristotle. It doesn't exist.

Reader:

^{xii} Rackham has “state.” The reader substitutes “city” for “state” throughout, and these instances will no longer be noted.

this is what has happened,^{xiii} for (one might argue) the laws of ancient times were too simple and uncivilized: the Hellenes, for instance, used both to carry arms and to purchase their wives from one another, and all the survivals of the customs of antiquity existing anywhere are utterly foolish, as for example at Cyme there is a law relating to trials for murder, that if the prosecuted on the charge of murder produces a certain number of his own relatives as witnesses, the defendant is guilty of the murder—

LS: In other words, he doesn't have a ghost of a chance.

Reader:

And in general all men really seek what is good, not what was customary with their forefathers; and it is probable that primitive mankind, whether sprung from the earth or the survivors of some destructive cataclysm, were just like ordinary foolish people, as indeed is actually said of the earth-born race, so that would be absurd for us to abide by their notions. Moreover even written codes of law may with advantage not be left unaltered. For just as in the other arts as well, so with the structure of the city it is impossible that it should have been framed aright in all its details; for it must of necessity be couched in general terms, but our actions deal with particular things. (1268b38-1269a12)

LS: Let us stop here. This is indeed a most important statement and, together with the immediate sequel which we will read very soon, in a way the most important statement in Aristotle's *Politics* as a whole, because here we are confronted with the most fundamental question separating modern man from premodern man. Aristotle was not aware that it would have this importance to modern man because he didn't know that such a thing as modernity would ever come. That is quite true.

The argument is then this. The art of politics or the art of legislation are sciences in the wide sense of the word, but all sciences change their procedures and/or their products because they progress. Hence the old things and institutions are inferior to the more recent things, and in the most radical way the things which were at the beginning were most low. "Primitive" means here from this point of view what is the poorest, least developed. Needless to say, the word primitive means originally only "the original." When people speak of primitive Christianity, they do not mean the lowest form of Christianity, but they may very well mean the highest. But here now something is primitive—primitive peoples, as they formerly said when they had not yet found the now-used word, which is "developing." I do not know; they always make changes in this matter. The principle is stated very clearly by these people. Aristotle does not agree with them; these are some other people, and they say what men seek by nature is not the ancestral—traditional custom, as we would translate it—but the good. With this statement Aristotle fully agrees, there is no question about that. The question is only which conclusion is to be drawn from that. The man who favors invention, like our ancestor Hippodamus, is bound to, if he is a rational being, favor political change for the better. Hippodamus may not have known it; it's too bad for him, but it is surely implied. If you want invention as such, you want also invention in social matters, and that means change. That is the case for this view, and it is

^{xiii} The reader now says "this is what has happened" in place of the phrase that Strauss just criticized in the Rackham translation, "in the actual events of history."

stated here in a very convincing way and it has not been stated better in modern times. There are some differences between Hippodamus and modern professors into which we do not have to go now. First let us hear Aristotle's argument, the case against changing laws.

Reader: Barker, page 73, paragraph 2.

But while these arguments go to show that in *some* cases, and at *some* times, law ought to be changed, there is another point of view from which it would appear that change is a matter which needs great caution. When we reflect that the improvement likely to be effected may be small, and that it is a bad thing to accustom men to abrogate laws light-heartedly, it becomes clear that there are some defects, both in legislation and in government, which had better be left untouched. The benefit of change will be less than the loss which is likely to result if men fall into the habit of disobeying the government. We must also notice that the analogy drawn from the arts is false. To change the practice of an art is not the same as to change the operation of a law. It is from habit, and only from habit, that law derives the validity which secures obedience. But habit can be created only by the passage of time; and a readiness to change from existing to new and different laws will accordingly tend to weaken the general power of law. Further questions may also be raised. Even if we admit that it is allowable to make a change, does this hold true, or not, of all laws and in all constitutions? And again, should change be attempted by any person whatsoever, or only by certain persons? It makes a great difference which of these different alternatives is adopted . . . We may therefore dismiss this question for the present. It belongs to a different occasion.^{xiv} (1269a13-27)

LS: Aristotle has never found the occasion, at least in his preserved writings, and so we must make the best of it. Now the key point here in this argument against change is that law has no power for what is being obeyed apart from custom, habit. Is this not strange? What is a law according to Aristotle and quite a few other people? If you say a law is simply a commandment of a superior, that would make sense, because that may have no other convincing force except the stick or the guns, or whatever power is at the disposal of the government. But what is the law according to Aristotle? If it is a law which deserves⁶ [the] name, then it is a rational prescription, a dictate of practical reason, and so it would have to have a power by virtue of the fact that it is rational.^{xv} Maybe that is not sufficient,⁷ and therefore it must be backed up by force, but it is surely a point to be considered. Here, however, Aristotle, in order to make the point quite clear, says law has no force except [. . .] i.e., its rationality is negligible as far as its being obeyed is concerned. That is very remarkable.

Student: I'm a little confused. He has said both of these things in different parts. Wouldn't the rationality part of it, in terms of being a good man, be superior in terms of—does he ever make a differentiation between the two and say which is more important?

LS: I would say the statement about the rationality of a good law made toward the end of the *Ethics* is at first glance more involved than this here, because this is made only in a polemical

^{xiv} Barker translation.

^{xv} Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.9, 1180a21–22.

context; the other is made in a nonpolemical context. Nevertheless, he makes that statement, and that is quite remarkable. This forces us to consider a difficulty which is a contemporary difficulty. If the law as law has no force by itself, however rational the law may be, then we must say a rational society is impossible, because a rational society would be a society every member, or at least a large majority of which is⁸ rational, and they act rationally. Then such a rational society is impossible.

In the last forty or fifty years or so a great change has taken place in political science, which those of you who know only present-day political science are not aware of except what they have learned from occasional polemical [. . .] science. There was once a time in which a thing existed [that is] now called the classical orthodox doctrine of democracy, in which democracy was understood to be the rational society; and I think there are some hints—some people believe that this was a position taken by John Stuart Mill, which is not quite true but let us leave it at that. Surely one could say the father of John Stuart Mill, James Mill, had something to do with that. These people had discovered, to their shock, what was called by them and others the irrationality of the masses. Have you ever heard that expression? There is also a word used, the “crowd psychology,”^{xvi} and that way we [see] also the notion that in an election the good man would win, assuming that he has the minimum of rhetorical facility that he can state the case [. . .] clearly, is now regarded and looked upon as a very naive and childish assumption. You surely have learned this much from your political science courses, even if you did not learn anything else. Do you recognize something of reality in what I sketch now?

Of⁹ course, these discoveries [are] based on a very large number of statistics and public opinion polls—public opinion polls wouldn’t be very good, because the man in the street who is asked about the rationality of the man in the street would not probably be the best man to ask, so it would have to be found out in some other way. Be this as it may, one surely doesn’t need scientific methods in order to establish this fact, and it was quite well known that most men act and think very irrationally. So if people had only read their Aristotle and similar men with reasonable care, they would not have been so surprised, as [. . .] was when he came from the Fabian Society and was running for office, and then saw that these notions he had of the people and the mass being fundamentally rational and just, compared with those crooked vested interest people, he wouldn’t have been in for such a disappointment as he was in.^{xvii}

Student: I think that you draw the wrong conclusion from the social science assertion that men act irrationally or not always rationally, and that is [that] all men have a nonrational component to the way they behave, and this applies to the gentleman as well as to the mass. And I think that’s a very important thing to assert, because what comes out of your statement is that the gentlemen act rationally, and the many act irrationally.

^{xvi} For example, Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895); Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921); Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933).

^{xvii} Possibly a reference to R. H. Tawney (1880–1962), a prominent member of the Fabian Society who stood unsuccessfully for Parliament three times. The Fabian Society is a British socialist organization that aims to reform democracy gradually in accordance with the principles of democratic socialism.

LS: The utmost I would grant you is that it might come out from what Aristotle says, not from what I say. The point which I would like to bring out has not been brought out yet, if you will wait a moment.

Hippodamus's position¹⁰ implies a kind of progressivism, in this sense: the belief that progress in social matters is as natural and as harmless on the whole as scientific or technical progress. That is the point, and Aristotle says progress in the arts is inevitable: that is the law of the arts. Medicine: people make new observations regarding diseases and their cure, that's inevitable. People will simply then replace the old cure by a better new cure, but in social and political matters that is [. . .] Now this had that great implication, that¹¹ most premodern men, we can say all premodern men, were not sanguine regarding social and political thought, fundamentally on the Aristotelian grounds, on the grounds that there is a fundamental difference between social progress and intellectual progress. This was radically changed in the seventeenth century when the new science and philosophy came up, represented by men like Descartes and Hobbes. At this time the view came to the fore that scientific progress is bound to lead to social progress—not all at once; it takes some time. First you get an enlightened gentry in Oxford and Cambridge, and then after—that was Hobbes's view of [. . .] the few people who have read the [. . .]—then¹² gradually that will spread to their tenants and what have you, and also of course to the merchants in London and Liverpool.^{xviii} Scientific progress leads necessarily, via the diffusion of scientific knowledge, to social progress. This is one of the most important trunks in the tree called modernity. This is absent from premodern thought.¹³

Descartes has been called the father of the French Revolution, and within these limits that is completely correct. Descartes's first and in a way surely his most beautiful book, *The Discourse on Method*, begins with an assertion of the intellectual equality of all men. Descartes, of all people, who knew what a superior mind he had, and he shows it, his awareness of it—this same Descartes says [that] men are by nature intellectually equal. The only difference is method. If you have the right method, then you can equalize the minds. There is a great element of truth in that, if you think that today problems in mathematics which were insolvable to the greatest mathematical geniuses of antiquity, and even of the seventeenth century, can now be solved by a twelve-year-old boy who is not mathematically gifted. There is some truth in it, but the question is whether it is so unqualifiedly true as some people believe.

This new view—scientific progress leads to the diffusion of scientific knowledge, and therefore to scientific knowledge enlightenment becoming a public power, becoming public opinion, and therewith political power—this culminated in the French Revolution. Then there was a reaction to it because quite a few people, and not only the dispossessed, didn't like that simply because the horrors of the Terror were not something for which people had bargained. Ever-increasing enlightenment is nice [. . .] and such people thought that is very fine; but then when you see these women of the halls of Paris^{xix} counting the heads falling down from the guillotines, that is meant to be rationality? There must be something wrong.

Now the most famous of the opponents of the French Revolution was of course Edmund Burke.

^{xviii} See Review and Conclusion, *Leviathan* (1651).

^{xix} Probably Les Halles.

The English equivalent of the French Revolution, one can say, was Utilitarianism, the movement of Bentham and James Mill. In a way, the attack of Burke on the French Revolution was repeated a generation later, or two generations later in the attack of Macaulay, the English historian, on James Mill, which is a very interesting essay and I think it should be read.^{xx}

In Macaulay I find a very beautiful statement. It is surely a very beautiful statement—whether it is right or wrong is [another]¹⁴ matter—about this very question Aristotle discusses here when taking up the question of Hippodamus. This statement has one quality [by] which those of you who have ever read Macaulay would not be surprised—I mean that it is very humorous. Now I read it to you: “Of all the acts that have ever been passed by Parliament, the Toleration Act [1690 or thereabouts—LS] is perhaps that which most strikingly illustrates the peculiar vices and the peculiar excellences of English legislation. The science of Politics bears in one respect a close analogy to the science of Mechanics.” . . . but then there are great differences.

“The perfect lawgiver is a just temper between the mere man of theory, who can see nothing but general principles, and the mere man of business who can see nothing but particular circumstances . . . in the English legislature, the practical element has always predominated, and not seldom unduly predominated, over the speculative. To think nothing of symmetry and much of convenience; never to remove an anomaly merely because it is an anomaly; never to innovate except when some grievance is felt; never to innovate except so far as to get rid of the grievance; never to lay down any proposition of wider extent than the particular case for which it is necessary to provide; these are the rules which have, from the age of John to the age of Victoria, generally guided the deliberations of our two hundred fifty Parliaments. Our national distaste for whatever is abstract in political science amounts undoubtedly to a fault. Yet perhaps it is a fault on the right side. That we have been far too slow to improve our laws must be admitted. But though in other countries there may occasionally have been more rapid progress, it would not be easy to name any other country in which there has been so little retrogression.”

LS: That still stands, doesn't it?

“The Toleration Act approaches very near to the idea of a great English law. To a jurist, versed in the theory of legislation, but not intimately acquainted with the temper of the sects and parties into which the nation was divided at the time of the Revolution, that Act would seem to be a mere chaos of absurdities and contradictions. It will not bear to be tried by sound general principles. Nay, it will not bear to be tried by any principles, sound or unsound . . . But these very faults may appear to be merits, when we take into consideration the passions and prejudices of these for whom the Toleration Act was framed. This law, abounding with contradictions which every smatterer in political philosophy can detect, did what a law framed by the utmost skill of the greatest masters of political philosophy might have failed to do. That the provisions which have been recapitulated are cumbrous, puerile, inconsistent with each other, inconsistent with the true

^{xx} Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Mill On Government,” in *The Miscellaneous Writings of Lord Macaulay* (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), I, 282–322. Available online at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/macaulay-miscellaneous-writings-vol-1>.

theory of religious liberty, must be acknowledged. All that can be said in their defense is this; that they removed a vast mass of evil without shocking a vast mass of prejudice.”^{xxi}

In that textbook of political science which I would edit, this would be an important part. This is stated from a very un-Aristotelian point of view and by a very un-Aristotelian man, but it comes as close to what Aristotle means in this passage as any other passage I have ever read. I thought I would deprive you of some pleasure if I did not read it to you.

There is another passage in the same volume—no, that is [. . .] when he speaks of the [Glorious] Revolution. How was the document called? The Abdication, of the so-called abdication of James II. He was really thrown out, but it was construed as an abdication, and Macaulay describes the absurdities of this statement. On the one hand they admit that he did not abdicate, but on the other hand they insist that he abdicated. And then he ends with this summary, roughly like this: These great statesmen who made the Revolution didn’t care.¹⁵[They weren’t concerned with] how the major agreed with the minor, and both with the conclusion. They were perfectly satisfied when the major brought two hundred votes, the minor two hundred other votes, and the conclusion still two hundred [more.]^{xxii}

Humor is very un-Aristotelian. This kind of humor is very un-Aristotelian, but the [. . .] point he makes is not alien to what Aristotle says here. One point I must add regarding inventions, and Aristotle’s distrust of inventions: this leads also to a very serious point, because there is one sphere where Aristotle must admit that the city ought to encourage inventions. That is, of course, military matters. There you have no choice. If you have an Archimedes who can make the city more able to defend itself¹⁶ against any attacker, then you will of course make the utmost [. . .] and force him perhaps even to do that. Therefore, here that is the only intrinsic weakness of Aristotle’s point: he is compelled by his principle to admit the necessity of military invention; and as he admits military invention, any invention may lead to unforeseeable social and political consequences. Aristotle had a protection against this difficulty, which however won’t hold up, and that is his belief that there will be periodic cataclysms, destructions [with]^{xxiii} only a few survivors on high mountains, so that this process of technological improvement would be stopped by nature, by good nature. We have no longer a right to assume that this will take place. We know from simple sense perception that this is not expected. But this point, that foreign bodies, enemies is the [. . .] difficulty insolvable for Aristotle^{xxiv} foreshadows the later attack on Aristotle by Machiavelli, where at least at first glance the problems of foreign policy seem to be [. . .]

I think the consideration, the reflection on this passage in the *Politics*, linked up with something we know about modern times, is helpful, very helpful for the understanding of

^{xxi} Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1898), 3: 66-68.

^{xxii} Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II*, 2: 575: “They cared little whether their major agreed with their conclusion, if the major secured two hundred votes, and the conclusion two hundred more.”

^{xxiii} In the original transcript: “cataclysms. Destructions [...]”

^{xxiv} This sentence is as it appears in the transcript.

what has happened and what are the truly decisive moments in the history of human thought, especially political thought. Now there were some points you wanted to raise.

Student: I'm a little puzzled by Aristotle's statement that the power of the law, its being obeyed, lies not in its rationality but rather solely in custom and tradition. Does this apply equally to the law of all regimes, good and bad? In other words, would it apply equally in a regime where merit was the guiding principle, in an aristocracy as in a democracy?

LS: Surely it would apply, because how do people become virtuous? By habituation. And if their habituation is changed in any important respect, it is bound to have consequences. In other words, a society of gentlemen—I am speaking now from the point of view of Aristotle—a society of gentlemen is, in present-day language,¹⁷ of course conservative. They do in the limits of the possible what their fathers did before them, and their grandfathers before them. There's no difficulty in that. The question more fully developed would lead to the question: What is the character of modern virtue? Is modern virtue simply rational? Simply rational it cannot be, because it has to do with the control of the subrational or irrational part of man and therefore that will somehow enter. Under no circumstances is moral virtue merely insight. Merely insight; that cannot be. If someone has seen that he is wrong, say, to steal, this insight does not make him a non-thief. The next temptation would show whether it has sunk in or not.

There are some more points—unfortunately we cannot discuss all of them. I would like to mention only one point. In the critique of Sparta, Aristotle discusses first the various inadequacies of Sparta, in particular the women. Never forget that Helen, this famous and notorious woman, was a Spartan girl; that was the way in which she was treated in classical Athens, by [. . .] and so on, but the key point which Aristotle makes, namely, what the premise of the Spartan polity is, in 1271b, a criticism which Plato had already made in the *Laws*.

Reader:

The entire system of the laws is directed toward one part of virtue only, military valor, because this is serviceable for conquest. Owing to this they remained secure while at war, but began to decline when they had won an empire, because they did not know how to live a peaceful life, and had been trained in no other form of training more important than the art of war. And another error no less serious than that one is this: they think that the coveted prizes of life are won by valor more than by cowardice, and in this they are right, yet they imagine wrongly that these prizes are worth more than the valor that wins them. (1271b1-10)

LS: That is a fundamental criticism, which is identical with Plato's criticism of Sparta. The other things are important but not fundamental. Now a little bit later, 1272b at the beginning, about the Cretans. "The cure which they have for these defects is absurd—"xxv

Reader: 1272b, Article 13.

^{xxv} Strauss's translation.

and less characteristic of a republic than of a dynasty. (1272b3-5)

LS: All right. The Greek word here is not political but “dynastic.” Dynastic is an extreme kind of oligarchy, but the interesting thing is the meaning of “political” here. “Political” can¹⁸ be translated here in this context by “republican.” It is interesting that it has also this meaning.

Student: Is this where you use dynastic as a clique of rulers?

LS: Small, very small. Oligarchy could, after all, be fifty or a hundred men, but a dynasty is very small. We will find an explicit discussion of dynasty in book 4.

Student: Barker mistranslated [it as] oligarchy. Dynasty because it’s a nonpolitical word, and “constitutional state” is his word for republic.^{xxvi}

LS: Yes, but this has other implications which are alien to that. In 1273[b] at the end there is this brief discussion of the Athenian polity and of this [. . .] polity, and that is a long question. Why he used [. . .] only in a kind of appendix and does not assign it a proper place, as he assigns to the Spartan or Cretan or Carthaginian, that is the question. I think Aristotle follows here a kind of gentleman’s prejudice. Gentlemen looked to Sparta, and while they had a certain respect for what they called the ancestral polity, meaning the predemocratic Athenian regime, still Sparta stood higher. And that is perhaps the simplest explanation.

There is only one other passage regarding usage, in 1273b32 to 34. We do not easily find it, when he speaks at the beginning of this chapter: “Some of them have become makers of laws, but others also of regimes.”^{xxvii} That’s the point I made last time, that laws in the widest sense differ fundamentally from a regime. A regime as regime, a polity, is not a law. It can be expressed, so to speak, by laws. To some extent it has to: who is not a citizen and who is not eligible for office, that surely will be expressed in the form of law, but that is not the fundamental point. The fundamental point is who belongs and who does not belong, and that depends not merely on the law; the law only expresses that. This question we will have to take up when we come to the next book, where the explicit and thematic discussion of polity is given.¹⁹

^{xxvi} In the original transcript: “belongs to an arbitrary oligarchy rather than a constitutional state.”

^{xxvii} Strauss’s translation.

Session 6: October 18, 1967
Book 2, chapters 1–6

Leo Strauss: Have you read Plato's *Republic*? When you read then Aristotle's criticism, what is your overall impression of that criticism?ⁱ

Student: He has taken only a small part of the *Republic* that he feels is . . .

LS: No, but what is your judgment on Aristotle's criticism?

Same Student: If you accept his original premise, his criticism is valid.

LS: No, but is there not an amazing contrast between the work which he criticizes and his own criticism? How would you describe that? Does he not seem to be blind to the splendor and beauty of Plato's shining temper?

Same Student: Yes. [Laughter]

LS: [. . .] should not conceal this from oneself that this is so. Nevertheless, it still [. . .] justified. For example, the philosophers are never mentioned, the rulers are never mentioned, and quite a few other things. Now this is one point, and connected with this of course is the question to which you alluded: whether Aristotle does not in some points misrepresent Plato. And I think you referred to Ernest Barker. We may take this up later.

Now I would like to mention only one point. You used the term "ideal" more than once. Now this term is unknown to Plato and Aristotle. I know the translators use it all the time, but they shouldn't. Why cannot one leave it by saying "the best regime"? Why is the "ideal" regime better? Because it is not an English or Anglo-Saxon word, ideal; whereas "best" is a word which even the simplest man who speaks English would understand under all conditions, and it is very [. . .] The term ideal, as far as I know, was coined in the seventeenth century in connection with some reflections on paintings. You can easily look that up in an historical dictionary. [. . .] The term coined by Thomas More in the early sixteenth century for his work *Utopia*ⁱⁱ would be much more appropriate than "ideal." But let us say "the best."

Now at the end of the first book of the *Politics* Aristotle refers exclusively to the subject: he will consider what other people have said about the regime that is best [. . .] This is the conclusion of a remark about how to educate women and children, and this depends on the regime; and therefore Aristotle cannot now discuss the situation of education of children and the management of wives. But he raises here the question: What is the right or noble kind of upbringing of children, and what is the one which is not noble? One is compelled to make this remark today—it is necessary to make it. For Aristotle it is no question: of course we have to find out the difference between the decent and the indecent form of bringing up children. What is political science for, if it doesn't

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

ⁱⁱ Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516).

raise this kind of question? So value judgments are not only something to be tolerated [. . .] but value judgments are the most important thing. Of course they must be well-founded—that's another matter—but in no way excluded. For the same reason, the question of the best regime is necessary if political science is to make any sense: just as a housebuilder must face the question of what is a good and beautiful house in contradistinction to a bad and ugly house, the same is true also of the student of political society.

In this respect there is no difference whatever between Aristotle and Plato. At the beginning of the second book one sees that Aristotle takes seriously the merely blueprinted regimes like Plato's and others, and the actual ones, say, like the Spartan. It doesn't make any difference to him. He speaks first of the most blueprinted of all, Plato's *Republic*, and only later on of Sparta and Crete, etc. This shows how superficial it is to oppose Aristotle the realist to Plato the idealist. Both are concerned with the best regime, and this question is independent of the question whether the best regime ever was actual. The best regime as best regime exists in speech, not necessarily in deed. This is [. . .] no difference between the two great men. Nevertheless, there is some truth in this popular opposition of Plato the idealist and Aristotle the realist. I mention this only because I hope¹ [these words] will never occur again in this seminar, but it is necessary [. . .]

What is the simple truth of the opposition? Let us take this question. There are such things as dogs, and the question arises at one point or another: What precisely is a true dog? And here Plato seems to say that the true dog is the idea of a dog, and this idea is unchangeable. [It] doesn't come into being, doesn't perish. Aristotle says: No, the true dog is this here dog. A dog which doesn't walk around, doesn't bark and make some other motions is not a true dog. Here Aristotle simply seems to speak sanity itself, speaking against a crazy doctrine. Since this seminar is devoted to Aristotle, we will not go into the question of what reasons Plato might have had for his apparently strange notion. We must consider the common ground which Plato and Aristotle have, although Plato says, to repeat, a true dog is an unchangeable dog. Aristotle says a true dog is this dog here, barking or whatever nonsense he might commit at the moment. This common ground is the notion of *eidē*. Now this means, literally translated, something like the shape or the looks of a thing, and for some reason takes on the meaning "the kinds." The crucial importance of this notion of *eidē*, of kinds—of essential differences, to use a traditional expression, that they share—that is this practical importance. The *eidos* of a thing, the class to which it belongs, the class character which the thing has determines the end, the perfection of that kind of [thing]. What is so remarkable about that? All excellences of individuals—say, individual human beings, to take the most interesting case—are located within an unchangeable [framework] and can only be recognized as excellences with reference to that unchangeable framework. I will ask Mr. [. . .] to read a passage to you from Nietzsche.

Reader: 148 in the Viking.ⁱⁱⁱ

On enjoying and suffering the passions.

My brother, if you have a virtue and she is your virtue, then you have her in common with nobody. To be sure, you want to call her by name and pet her; you want to pull her ear, and have fun with her. And behold, now you have her name in common with the people, and

ⁱⁱⁱ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (NY: The Viking Press, 1954), 148.

you have become one of the people and herd with your virtue.

You would do better to say, “Inexpressible and nameless is that which gives my soul agony and sweetness and is even the hunger of my entrails.”

May your virtue be too exalted for the familiarity of names: and if you must speak of her, then do not be ashamed to stammer of her. Then speak and stammer, “This is *my* good; this I love; it pleases me wholly; thus alone do *I* want the good.”

LS: The “I” and the “me” you should always emphasize.

Reader:

I do not want it as divine law; I do not want it as human statute and need: it shall not be a signpost for me to overearths and paradises. It is an earthly virtue that I love: there is little prudence in it, and least of all the reason of all men.

LS: This is perhaps the most extreme and un-Aristotelian statement. What is truly virtuous in any virtue is that it is individual virtue, the virtue of this or that individual in [Nietzsche]. For Plato and Aristotle, virtue consists in conforming with the universal standard and not in being individual in this radical sense, as nature meant it.

To give you another inkling of what this notion of *eidē*, of classes and class character, means: often [. . .] is concerned with the whole, and the whole consists of parts. Take a doctrine which is easily intelligible to us, atomism, a doctrine which was developed long before Plato’s time. The parts are atoms, and every kind of being, say, dogs or rabbits, or tigers or men, are different compounds of atoms. In the modern day you could give a formula, and in this formula are the same kinds of atoms that always occur in different places to different degrees. Or say the four elements, that was also a doctrine. Now what Plato and Aristotle say is this: the true parts of the whole are neither atoms nor the elements, but the kinds: various kinds of plants, various kinds of animals. These are the enlightening, the life-giving parts of the whole. That which [is] at the surface, as it were, that’s a cat, that’s a dog—that is deeper than any atomic formula and any formula of atomic composition and anything of this kind could reveal. Saying it somewhat more differently, the primary qualities in the Lockean sense are not primary. If we want to make such a distinction, the class characters are the primary kinds of qualities. Therefore the human as human is as fundamental as anything else can be and [is] not to be understood as derivative from other species of animals or ultimately from the [. . .]^{iv}

When Aristotle speaks at the end of the first book of the best *politeia*, *politeia* is a Greek word which I translate by “regime”; and if you would look at the beginnings of book[s] 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7, which you can do at home, you would see that all these books begin with a reference either to the best regime or at least to the regime in general. Regime, whatever that may mean—we will hear about it a week from today in more detail—is the theme of Aristotle’s *Politics*, and not the *polis*. The *polis* is of course implied, but the theme is the *politeia*. In order to give you a provisional understanding, I remind you of something very elementary, namely, the obvious ambiguity of the word political as it is now used. On the one hand, “political” can have a respectable or at least a neutral meaning, a political society or what not, but it also has a

^{iv} Strauss presumably referred here to the elements, matter, or Lockean primary qualities.

disreputable meaning. When people say, “This move of Mayor Daley^v was politically motivated,” then it means it was not for the sake of the common good but for the promotion of oneself, or one’s party or one’s section, and so on. This peculiar ambiguity is remarkable. What is its root? The *polis* consists of parts, and each of the parts claims preponderance, rightly or wrongly; and therefore, if you consider the *polis* as a whole, directed toward the common good, that’s fine. But if we consider the fact that the *polis* consists of parts, and that political action consists in fact to a considerable extent of the parts claiming unfairly preponderance, then politics is a dirty business. Both things belong together; they are inseparable—and only think of the fact that you have no such ambiguity in the word social, or the word historical, or psychological, or other terms. The only other case of a clear ambiguity of a high and low meaning of the same word of the various disciplines is perhaps philosophical or metaphysical, but politics is in this interesting position that it has also this striking ambiguity.

At the beginning of book 2 Aristotle speaks of two reasons for considering the other regimes which are reputed to be good: first, to learn something through the critical study of them; and secondly, it is necessary to do that because of the peculiar subject matter, to protect oneself against the suspicion that one proposes another best regime from ambition. No such excuse is made by Aristotle at the beginning of his *Physics* or in the *Ethics*. Whoever deals with political things, as Aristotle does here, exposes himself to the suspicion that he is a politician in the negative sense of the term.

The first question which Aristotle raises before he turns to the discussion of any of these regimes is: Must citizens share everything or not everything? That they should share everything is the thesis of Plato’s *Republic*; therefore, he turns immediately to Plato’s *Republic*, and he criticizes in the first place Plato’s assertion that there ought to be community of women and children. What is Aristotle’s chief point in that criticism? Can you restate it?

Student: The first one is that total unity is more like the individual in the family and the village than like the *polis*.

LS: Well, Aristotle says Plato wants community. Absolute communism. By absolute communism I mean communism regarding not only property but also regarding women and children, because Plato believes the goodness of the city consists in its unity as a maximum unity, and this is based on passages in Plato’s *Republic*. Aristotle questions that. He says: Of course, in a sense the city must be unity, but unity is not an adequate description of the end of the *polis*. An adequate description is what? What term does he propose?

Student: Eventually he proposes self-sufficiency.

LS: Self-sufficiency, yes, and not unity. This is the most general criticism. Not the maximum unity but the maximum self-sufficiency. This criticism of Plato’s *Republic* is paralleled by his earlier criticism of Socrates’s teaching regarding virtue. In 1260a21 following, when he takes issue with Socrates since he wanted to give a universal answer to the question, What is virtue? instead of considering—he says [. . .] merely enumerating the various kinds of virtues. It was much better. An

^v Richard J. Daley served as Chicago’s mayor from 1955 to 1976.

over-great concern with unity, and this is [. . .] the ultimate difference: Is a true dog this dog here or the one dog, the ideal dog? To be truly—that is Plato’s assumption, it seems—is not to have any mixture of nonbeing [. . .] that means of course to be imperishable and unchangeable. If a being is changeable and perishable, it has nonbeing in itself. There is simple reasoning leading to this notion of the [. . .] and also of the same connection is Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s assertion or [. . .] there is no essential difference between the *polis*, the city, and the household. It is only a difference of degree—of size, not of kind. Plato is too much concerned with unity. That can be said to be the general point of Aristotle’s criticism. But Aristotle goes beyond this point, to which he returns from time to time. Even granting that maximum unity is the best, communism does not bring about that maximum unity. That’s the next point, and in this connection he refers to the paralogism due to the word “all.” Do you remember that point?

Student: He says that all can be considered in two senses: the one in which it means each separately, or the one in which it means all collectively.

LS: Yes. Can you give examples of them? All distributively and all collectively. For example, you say “all Greece”: it is distributive because everyone breathes. But when you say “all elect a president,” then it is not true that each elects a president because there will be at least a minority who will be out of it, but only in their capacity as the electorate as a whole, collectively, do they do that.

If we apply this to communism, Aristotle says each will say of all things, “This is mine,” and all will call all the common things mine. That is to say, no one can call any common thing mine; only all together they can say that, and therefore no one has access to any [. . .] because² [they] are common property; it cannot belong to [. . .] or anyone in particular. The main and most simple point here is the one stated in 1261b30 following.

Reader:

For “all” to say the same thing is in one sense admirable, although impracticable, but in another sense is not at all a sign of concord. And furthermore, the proposal has another disadvantage. Property that is common to the greatest number of owners receives the least attention; men care most for their private possessions, and for what they own in common less, or only so far as it falls to their own individual share; for in addition to the other reasons, they think less of it on the grounds that someone else is thinking about it, just as in household service a large number of domestics sometimes give worse attendance than a smaller number. And it results in each citizen’s having a thousand sons, and these do not belong to them as individuals but any child is equally the son of anyone, so that all alike will regard them with indifference. (1261b30-1262a1)

LS: Now if we take this literally, that men are more concerned with what is private, one’s own, than with the common things, this would be bound to have very grave consequences regarding the *polis*. It surely indicates a problem of the *polis*. How is it possible to have a concern with the common good if everyone gives preference to his own good? A general answer was indicated by Aristotle before. Do you remember that? A general one. If you can call that [. . .] that everyone thinks naturally first of himself, how is that compatible with the true public spirit? What is the basis for its

possible compatibility?

Student: The city is good for every man . . .

LS: Yes, or man is by nature a political being, so that is the rule for a passable reconciliation of these difficulties. Now what are the other points? When you turn to 1262a13, when he makes clear this [. . .] criticism of Plato, it is preferable, or better, to be a private nephew than in the Platonic way a son—the Platonic way meaning a young man is the son of all, of all citizens. And then you are very³ [little] of a son if you are the son of a thousand men, but if you are even a grandnephew of a single man,⁴ you have a much better chance of being truly loved than to be a son of this many.

Reader:

Moreover it would also be impossible to avoid man's supposing certain persons to be their real brothers and sons and fathers and mothers; for they would be bound to form their belief about each other by the resemblances which occur between children and parents.

LS: This refers to the Platonic view that no man or woman of the younger generation or a child should know his true parents and should regard all men of the older generation as his fathers and all women of the older generation as his mothers. Aristotle says it won't work because physiognomic appearances would in some cases leave no doubt about the true father or the true mother.

Reader:

This indeed is said by some of those who write about travels round the world actually to occur; they say that some of the people of Upper Libya have their wives in common, yet the children born are divided among them according to their personal resemblances. And there are some females both of the human race and of the other animals, for instance horses and cattle, who have a strong natural tendency to produce offspring resembling the male parents, as with the case of the mare at Pharsalus named Honest Lady. (1262a17-24)

LS: "Honest" because she reproduced the lineaments of the true husband; in other words, she didn't commit adultery. Then he gives other reasons which are also very characteristic. Read only the beginning.

Reader: Barker, 1262a, chapter 4, Article 1.

Moreover it is not easy for those who institute this communism to guard against such objectionable occurrences as outrage, involuntary and in some cases voluntary homicide, fights, abusive language; all which are violations of piety when committed against fathers, mothers, and near relatives as if they were not relatives; but these are bound to occur more frequently when people do not know their relations than when they do; and also, when they do occur, if the offenders know their relationship it is possible for them to have the customary expiations performed. (1262a25-33)

LS: That's very characteristic of Aristotle. Aristotle is not a simple believer in the traditional Greek rights and so on, but in a political argument, when speaking to people who are supposed to

believe [. . .] and which would be rightly demanded, Aristotle accepts these commonly accepted notions of piety, and this of course throws light on Plato's procedure in the *Republic*. Plato disregards these things. Plato in fact abolishes the laws against incest between brothers and sisters. He preserves in a way the prohibition against incest between parents and children because there will be no intercourse between men of the older generation and women of the younger generation, but there are of course always borderline cases. Where do you draw the line between the two generations? You have to draw it somewhere. So there may be say a woman of twenty-one who might belong to the older generation . . . but there will be borderline cases where you do not know exactly, and this leads to complications.

Student: Just demand that there be no more than a ten year age differential.

LS: But what happens to those in between then?

Same Student: No, between [. . .] You don't have to fall into the generation classes. We speak of generations . . .

LS: But then [. . .] how complicated would these arrangements be?

Same Student: You'd just know everybody's age.

LS: But would this work? At any rate, Aristotle's procedure here—the acceptance of the generally accepted views—implies, one can say, the world Aristotle tacitly assumes: the world as a whole is in order; and therefore we have to change a few things, but in the main it is in order. Plato does not, and this is the root then of what in modern terms would be Plato's radicalism in contradistinction to Aristotle's lack of the same. We find further evidence for that later.

When he speaks in the sequel, there is a Machiavellian and ironical aside of Aristotle. He says the Platonic arrangement is bound to cause so much strife and controversy that it would be much better to assign the communism regarding women and children to the ruled class, so that they have their own troubles and do not create too much troubles to the government. Now let us turn to 1262b3.

Reader:

But speaking generally such a law is bound to bring about the opposite state of things to that which rightly enacted laws ought properly to cause, and because of which Socrates thinks it necessary to make these regulations about the children and women. For we think that friendship is the greatest of blessings for the city, since it is the best safeguard against revolution, and the unity of the city, which Socrates praises most highly, both appears to be and is said by him to be the effect of friendship, just as we know that Aristophanes in the discourses on love describes how the lovers owing to their extreme affection desire to grow together and both become one instead of being two. In such a union both personalities, or at least one, would be bound to be obliterated; and in the city friendship would inevitably become diluted in consequence of such association. (1262b3-14)

LS: So in other words, friendship, i.e., the preservation of the multiplicity of the partners, yes, but unity, no, because unity, if in any sense strictly understood, would lead to the absorption of one by the other if not⁵ [to the destruction] of both. And he refers here to what Aristophanes said in [the *Symposium*]^{vi} about love, that it is a desire for complete unity.^{vii} But Aristophanes says here of course not what Socrates says, also what [. . .] Plato mean? Aristophanes's notion of love, of *erōs*—and that is an imitation on Plato's part of Aristophanes's peculiar comic inclinations; Plato ascribes to Aristophanes the view that *erōs* is a desire for [. . .] union, metaphor for lying together. And the Platonic view of *erōs* is vertical, union with something in something transcending, say, the good; and this of course we must note, but even Aristotle would say that⁶ the individual is meant to assimilate himself to the good, or to God as Plato also sometimes says. To that extent, immersion of the individual in the higher, the [. . .] higher, also means a destruction of the individual in his [. . .] Now I think we must leave it at this passage in the section on communism of women and children. Now let us turn to Aristotle's criticism of Socrates's assertion regarding communism and property, and let us begin in 1263a37.

Reader:

It is clear therefore that it is better for possessions to be privately owned, but to make them common property in use; and to train the citizens to this is the special task of the legislator. And moreover to feel that thing is one's private property makes an inexpressibly great difference in one's pleasure; for the universal feeling of love for oneself is surely not purposeless, but a natural instinct. Selfishness on the other hand is justly blamed; but this is not to love one's self but to love one's self more than one ought, just as covetousness means loving money to excess—since some love of self, money, and so on is practically universal. Moreover, to bestow favors and assistance on friends or visitors or comrades is a great pleasure, and a condition of this is the private ownership of property. These advantages therefore do not come to those who carry the unification of the city too far; and in addition to this they manifestly do away with the practice of two virtues, temperance in relation to women (for it is a noble deed to refrain from one through temperance when she belongs to another) and liberality in relation to possessions (for one will not be able to show one's liberality nor perform a single liberal action, since the active exercise of liberality takes place with the use of possessions). (1263a37-1263b13)

LS: Now let us stop here one moment. Only one slight correction of the translation. For one will not be visibly liberal, and the other one will not be visibly temperate, if Plato's proposals would be accepted. In other words, the intentions toward liberality and toward temperance may be possible in any regime, but the visibility of these things in actions—and that is the true actuality of the intentions, that they become visible in action—that is not possible.

Self-love is something natural, and that is the point on which Aristotle's criticism turns all the time. Therefore men [were] born to have things of their own and cherish them; that is perfectly in order, and human life will be disturbed radically if there is no longer mine and thine regarding women, children, and property. How much human life will be disturbed by it is shown by the fact that there are some virtues in which everyone can see that these virtues presuppose things of one's

^{vi} The original transcript has “inaudible” here.

^{vii} *Symposium* 189c–193d.

[. . .] and the cases are temperance and liberality. Now let us read the continuation.

Reader: Barker, 1263b, chapter 5, Article 11.

Such legislation therefore has an attractive appearance, and might be thought to be humane—

LS: “Philanthropic” is the more literal translation.

Reader:

for he who is told about it welcomes it with gladness, thinking that it will result in a marvelous friendliness of everybody towards everybody, especially when somebody denounces the evils at present existing in cities as due to the fact that wealth is not owned in common—I mean lawsuits between citizens about breach of contract, and trials for perjury, and the flattery of the rich. But the real cause of all these evils is not the absence of communism, but wickedness, since we see far more quarrels recurring among those who own or use property in common than among those who have their estates separate; but we notice that those who quarrel as a result of their partnerships are few when compared with the total number of private owners. And again it is just to state not only all the evils that men will lose by adopting communism, but also all the good things; and life in such circumstances is seen to be utterly impossible. (1263b14-28)

Student: In the Barker translation, it translates “wickedness of human nature.”

LS: No, that’s impossible. Impossible. [. . .] I mean, how could Aristotle say such a thing? And of course it was also not taught by theology because it was [. . .] to sin man’s [. . .] corruption. The man who openly taught that man is by nature evil was Hegel, and in a way perhaps Hobbes before him. Hobbes does it with some hemming and hawing, but I think one can say he does it.

Now here the term which he uses—I do not know whether it would have occurred to most of you or any of you when reading the *Republic*, as this is a particularly philanthropic term. Now philanthropy of course means something slightly different in Greek than it means now. The literal meaning is love of human being[s]. But it may have this meaning: some people love dogs; others love birds; and there are also some who love human beings. In other words, it would all depend on what kind of human beings. If he loves good human beings, that is sensible, but if he loves indiscriminately, that is something unreasonable. Today, I believe, and that is also correct to say, the inspiration of Plato’s *Republic* is zeal for justice. But we would today make a distinction between zeal for justice and philanthropy. The element of compassion which belongs to philanthropy is not necessarily implied in zeal for justice.

But now to come to the substance of Aristotle’s criticism here: what is underlying this Platonic notion of having absolute communism and the complete abolition of privacy, except where it cannot be abolished: for example, your intake of food must remain your private affair, because otherwise you will starve. But otherwise, everyone can enter everybody else’s room at any time of the day or night, which is the greatest possible [. . .] for Aristotle. Everything has to be in the open. Now Plato seems to assume that by abolishing privacy, by abolishing the opportunity to cheat, he abolishes cheating, and that is what Aristotle has here ultimately in mind. If everyone

always lives in the open, he cannot cheat, just as you say if everyone is always naked, he cannot conceal on his person something which he has lifted from a shop.

Since Plato thinks one can abolish doing [. . .] that one can abolish injustice by taking away the opportunity for doing an injustice, therefore he can regard as possible the cessation of all evils, which is the explicit goal of the establishment of that perfect city in the *Republic* as stated in book 5.^{viii} But there is a parallel passage in another dialogue called [*Theaetetus*], in which it is said the cessation of evil on earth is impossible.^{ix} So you have to think a bit more deeply. But officially that is the Platonic teaching, one can say. Now let us go on at the point where we left off, 1263b29.

Reader:

The cause of Socrates' error it must be deemed to be that his fundamental assumption was incorrect. It is certain that in a way both the household and the city should be a unit, but they should not be so in every way.

LS: Yes, and so on; and then he develops this again, this point which we have seen all the time: the fundamental error of Socrates is to identify the goodness of the city with its oneness, without paying sufficient attention to the necessary multiplicity. Now let us go on in 1264a1, another consideration.

Reader:

This very point also must not be ignored, that attention must be paid to length of time and to the long period of years, in which it would not have escaped notice if these measures were good ones; for nearly all of them have been discovered already, although some of them have not been collected together and others though brought to knowledge are not put into practice.

LS: That is also very characteristic of Aristotle. There is no profound change. Everything useful has been found out, but nevertheless it has not been put into practice and it has not been joined together properly. Therefore it is possible and necessary still to raise the question of the best regime because, although all of its ingredients are wrong, it has not necessarily been put together. In spite of this conservatism for Aristotle, it is perfectly possible according to him that the question of the best regime has not yet been sufficiently answered, and therefore that his own enterprise in this work makes sense. Now let us go on in the next part, 1264a11.

Reader:

Moreover, the working of the constitution as a whole in regard to the members of the city has also not been described by Socrates, nor is it easy to say what it will be. Yet the general mass of the citizens of the other classes make almost the bulk of the city and about these no definite regulations are laid down, as to whether the Farmers also are to have their property in common or to hold it in private ownership, and also whether the community of wives and children is to apply to them or not. (1264a11-17)

^{viii} Plato, *Republic* 473d.

^{ix} Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a.

LS: Is this the point, Miss [. . .], where Barker says Aristotle [. . .] is wrong?

Student: He says he neglects.

LS: Yes, but the question is: How is this possible, that a man of the intelligence of Aristotle and who lived together with Plato as a younger friend for twenty years should have misunderstood it all? Can we imagine he read the *Republic*, say, twenty years before he wrote that and speaks only from memory? No. I believe what Aristotle means is this. Aristotle is of course not merely concerned with⁷ whether Plato says this literally and so on [. . .] so that he can quote, but Aristotle speaks from the point of view of a thinking reader.

Plato has not made this clear for the following reason. You want to have two classes, the class of the soldiers, and the class of the producers and exchangers—what he calls here the farmers. If a child of the farmer class is superior, then he must be transferred to the higher class, and vice versa. But unfortunately these superiorities and inferiorities do not show necessarily at the moment of birth, and even if a baby should look like a god, so to speak, he could nevertheless prove to be a very foolish and undesirable individual later on. The transfer will take place later, after it has appeared that this child is too good for the lower class or too bad for the upper class. But by that time he knows already his other parents, and this creates a very great problem and as they say today, all kinds of traumata which would upset the whole thing.

Therefore Plato has to face this question—and he does not discuss that, and therefore the thinking reader must say: Where do you stand? What do you prefer? Do you prefer your rule laid down, and then you get into the trouble indicated, or is it not wiser then to have a clear—a kind of class system, so that there will be no transfer from one class to the other? Connected with this, there is of course—and all you could say, all you have in a way [to do is] to abolish the difference within the two classes, at least to that extent that all children are common in both classes so that no child ever knows his parents, because immediately after birth he will be transferred to a kind of kindergarten. Then of course he cannot get any kind of particular attachment to his natural parents; and then there would be the children in common for the lower class in the lower kindergarten, and for the upper class children, the higher kindergarten. I believe that same consideration applies to all criticism of Plato, even if it seems to be contradicted flatly by the wording of Plato's *Republic*.

One more point regarding the *Republic*, at the end, in 1264b15, the point which was mentioned by Miss [. . .] at the end of her paper. At a certain point in the *Republic* an objection is raised: But will they not be very miserable?⁸ These soldiers are practically monks, these monk-soldiers living for obedience, in poverty—and in a way also in chastity because they are permitted to have intercourse only when their superiors feel that this would be a good stallion, then he will be commanded, but that's all—would they not be very miserable? And the answer given is: Well, we are not concerned with whether they or any individual is miserable or not, but the whole.^x And this is the point which Aristotle attacks here.

Reader:

^x *Republic* 419a ff.

And again, although he deprives the Guardians of happiness, he says that it is the duty of the lawgiver to make the whole city happy. But it is not possible for the whole to be happy unless most or all of its parts, or some of them, possess happiness. For happiness is not a thing of the same sort as being an even number: that may belong to the whole but to neither of its parts, but happiness cannot belong to the whole and not to its parts. But yet, if Guardians are not happy, what other class is? For clearly the Artisans and the general mass of the vulgar classes are not. The republic discussed by Socrates therefore possesses these difficulties and also others not smaller than these. (1264b15-25)

LS: Yes, that is clear. Five plus three is eight; five and three are odd, and yet eight is even. But you cannot make a city happy if every part of the city is miserable.

Student: I'd like to ask a broad question about the nature and the level of Aristotle's criticism of the *Republic*, namely, at least one interpretation of the teaching of the *Republic* is that the *Republic* is precisely designed to show the impossibility of such a scheme, and that in fact it has within itself the decisive criticism of its scheme, namely, among other things that the trifold distinction would be between body and soul, etc., and that of the city is not equivalent. In other words, this raises two questions. If Aristotle were aware of this teaching, why does he attack it at all if the attack is implicit in Plato's own work? And secondly, why he chooses to attack it on such a low level?

LS: Low level, you cannot say: obvious level. Obviously when you read the *Republic*—I mean I know this from my own experience—the first impression is, and I had this impression for about fifteen or twenty years, that it is meant as a proposal for improvement of civil society. Pascal once said that Plato and Aristotle are not [. . .] but men of the world, and one cannot believe that they should have meant their proposals seriously.^{xi} I agree now with Pascal—but very few people do, I think—but it took some time. Pascal didn't give any argument to prove it, so it is not on the surface. On the surface is a teaching about the best polity, and Aristotle is very strict [. . .] about the philosophers. Why? Because the philosophers come near the *Republic* only as a means for getting this beautiful superstrata which was described in books 2 to 4, or the middle of book 5, and then it's: How can we get it? And then the answer—and there is only one elegant way, and that is that the philosophers are kings, and vice versa, kings become philosophers. And so philosophy comes in only as a means to an end, not as an end, which is of course against nature. But Aristotle is very precise, takes Plato by his word, since he treats philosophy as not an integral part of the best *polis* but only as a means for its reception.

[. . .] about it, and here of course is the⁹ [precedent] of Plato in the *Timaeus* where there is a summary given at the beginning of the teaching of the *Republic*, and where there is also a complete¹⁰ [silence] about philosophy.^{xii}

And the same here: communism. It must be discussed, because even apart from [the *Republic*], some men holding independently of Plato might think it would be a good notion to have women and children in common. It is an important problem, even though perhaps the originator of the

^{xi} Blaise Pascal, Pensée 533, in *Pensées* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 188.

^{xii} Plato, *Timaeus* 17c–19a.

doctrine did not mean it seriously, but it is something worthwhile in itself. We find there are some other examples. Now let us turn to the critique of the *Laws* which follows here, and begin at 1265a1 to 2.

Reader:

The largest part is mostly a collection of statutes.

LS: Of laws.

Reader: But it doesn't say laws.

LS: But here it says very little about the *politeia*. Now here in the first occasion we had, I had to emphasize this point that the word *politeia*, which is ordinarily translated by constitution, is not in the usual sense of the word constitution. You can say that it is a constitution in the sense in which you speak of a man's, of a horse's, of a [. . .] constitution. In that sense you can say it. But [there is] another constitution which we mean today politically, namely, a fundamental law. The fact that this distinction is made here between the polity and the law shows that the polity, the regime, is not a law and not in particular the fundamental law. It may express itself in laws, but that is not necessary. The legal expression may be deliberately deceptive about the regime. One of the favorite objects of debunk[ing] in political science is that a constitution is not necessarily what it says it is—a thing with which the ancients were thoroughly familiar. Now a bit later, 1265a10, when he speaks about Socrates's speeches in general.

Reader:

Now it is true that all the speeches^{xiii} of Socrates possess brilliance, cleverness, originality and keenness of inquiry, but it is no doubt difficult to be right about everything.

LS: Let us stop here. This is a great comment of all speeches of Socrates, but it is perhaps difficult that they should be right on every point, but one shouldn't expect too much. Now the funny thing is here that he ascribes the *Laws* to Socrates, and Socrates¹¹ never occurs in the *Laws*. As a matter of fact, the *Laws* are the only Platonic dialogue in which Socrates doesn't occur at all. What does he mean by that? With what right can he ascribe the teaching of the *Laws* to Socrates?

Student: The notion that the Stranger is—that Socrates, who had escaped, had not gone to Thessaly . . .

LS: Yes, had gone to Crete. In the discussion of whether Socrates should escape from jail in the *Crito*, there is a [. . .] and Socrates shows that he couldn't go to a lawabiding city nearby because then he would be recognized as a fugitive from justice; or if he would go to a lawless city far away, like Thessaly, that would be a miserable life because of the lawlessness.^{xiv} The possibility of a lawabiding city far away which would be Crete is not discussed, and that points to Socrates. One could make, though, this objection that the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* is presented as a

^{xiii} Rackham has "discourses."

^{xiv} Plato, *Crito* 53b–d.

man who has traveled very much, whereas Socrates has traveled very little. Does this settle the issue? I mean, who is the most famous of all travelers?

Student: Herodotus?

LS: No. Odysseus—more famous. And Socrates is more than once compared [with] or compares himself to Odysseus. In the deeper sense of travel, which is not to be decided by empirical considerations narrowly conceived, Socrates might very well be a widely-traveled man. Let us read on then where we left off.

Reader:

For instance with regard to the size of population just mentioned it must not be overlooked that a territory as large as that of Babylon will be needed for so many inhabitants, or some other country of unlimited extent, to support five thousand men in idleness and another swarm of women and servants around them many times as numerous. It is proper no doubt to assume ideal conditions—(1265a12-17)

LS: It is proper to assume, make assumptions “according to wish or prayer.” That would be the proper translation, not “ideal.” Wish, according to wish or prayer—of course of a sensible man, that’s always understood; not what a fool would wish or pray. The best regime which we seek is one possible under the most favorable conditions. These are the conditions for which one would, to be sure, pray. These conditions are possible, because if they were not possible,¹² any proposal would be preposterous; whereas when people speak of an ideal today, they may very well imply that it is not possible but only meant as a rule to approximate. which could never be achieved. That is not what Plato and Aristotle mean. Now there is one point a little bit later, another defect of the *Laws*. Let us turn to 1265b26.

Reader:

The whole constitution is intended, it is true, to be neither a democracy nor an oligarchy, but of the form intermediate between them which is termed a republic—

LS: I would say “mean between them.” That brings it out a bit better. The mean between them, the mean meaning here having the advantages of the two extremes but lacking their disadvantages, so therefore superior to the two extremes.

Reader:

called polity,^{xv} for the government is constituted from the class that bears arms. If therefore he introduces—

LS: “Bears arms” means people who have some property, because arms have to be brought by the individuals concerned. Heavy arms or horses or knights.

Reader:

If therefore he introduces this constitution as the one most commonly existing of all forms of

^{xv} The reader re-reads the last words of the passage he had just read; Rackham has “termed a republic.”

regimes in the actual cities, he has made perhaps a good proposal, but if he introduces it as the next best to the first form of constitution, regime,^{xvi} it is not a good proposal; for very likely one might approve the Spartan regime more highly, or perhaps some other form nearer to an aristocracy. In fact some people assert that the best regime must be a combination of all the forms of regimes, and therefore praise the regime of Sparta. (1265b26-33)

LS: We can drop this part, and when he goes on in 1266a about the *Laws*.

Reader:

In Plato's *Laws* on the other hand it is stated that the best regime must consist of a combination of democracy and tyranny, which one might refuse to count as constitutional governments at all, or else rank as the worst of all regimes. (1266a1-3)

LS: This is another point. Aristotle rejects Plato's teaching regarding the best regime as presented in the *Laws*, but in this particular point one can say Plato never says in the *Laws* that the best regime should be a mixture of a democracy and tyranny. This formula never occurs. There is a reference to a mixture of democracy and monarchy, but it is something very different, because monarchy is of course [. . .] But if one digs a bit deeper and follows the argument of the *Laws*, one sees that Aristotle points to something in the *Laws* which is very important.

When Plato speaks about legislation, he says a good law must consist of two parts. First, of the wording of the law with the proper punishment: Don't do this or else; and then a reasoning which also may precede the law proper [. . .] records a prelude which presents a reason for the laws and which appeals to the reason of the [. . .] So the law consists of two parts: a part appealing to reason and presupposing the subject to be a free man, and this is democratic in the widest sense of the term; and of a tyrannical element: simply come down with a heavy hand on the transgressor. And to that extent this is what Aristotle has in mind. So one must never leave it at the convenient point, convenient assertion which one can make from time to time very well, [that] Aristotle says something which Plato never says. But the question is whether Aristotle does not have in mind something which is in there, in the *Laws*, although not everyone would think of this particular point.

Then he goes on in his critique of the polity of the *Laws*, and then he makes a point which is manifestly correct as far as the factual basis is concerned, and that is [that] the polity recommended by Plato in the *Laws* is plutocratic. The rich as rich are given a greater power than they deserve. The rich as rich—if the same power were given to the virtuous as virtuous, that would be all right [. . .] but there the power is given to the rich as rich. That is a problem of which we will hear quite a bit in the sequel, and where there is of course this great difficulty. If the virtuous men are to be preferred, there must be ways of recommending the virtuous as virtuous. And no one can see in their heart; therefore let us be satisfied if people behave virtuously even if they do it out of calculation. But if they behave virtuously out of calculation throughout their lives, then they are practically indistinguishable from genuinely virtuous men. But still, this is not quite sufficient because, as Aristotle teaches, you cannot be virtuous in the

^{xvi} The reader adds "regime" as a substitute for "constitution." This modification occurs throughout and will no longer be noted.

moral sense of the word, morally virtuous, without having what he calls equipment, and equipment meaning some property. For example, how can you have the virtue of liberality if you do not have money to spare? . . . Other similar things apply to other virtues. In the case of other virtues, the temptations to, say, injustice, stealing, and so forth, are very much greater for a poor man than for a man of sufficient means. Habitual temptations are not habitually resisted, and therefore the kind of assumption that these people are less virtuous. Therefore, what you can find out easily is if this man has sufficient money for equipping himself as a heavy infantryman or as a knight. That you can easily find out. Then, all right, only people who have these qualifications are full citizens. That's more or less what Plato suggested in the *Laws*. Now we will hear much more about that in the sequel.

Session 7: October 25, 1967
Book 3, chapters 1–6

Leo Strauss: I would like to take up two points which you made in your paper.ⁱ You seem to say that Aristotle is not antidemocratic.

Student: No, I implied that some of the arguments put forth against his being antidemocratic are false.

LS: That is always a wide statement. I mention only one point. You quoted from him that he thinks that in a well-ordered city mechanics and artisans would not be made citizens, and that is surely an antidemocratic statement. Let us not beat around the bush. Aristotle was definitely opposed to democracy. But the question is: What was the reason for that? Was he a paid agent of feudal lords or whatnot, or did he not have good reason? I think he had one very good reason, and that will come out again and again. Democracy means the rule of the poor, and that means the rule of those who have to work hard—not eight hours a day, but much more, especially in the times of sowing and harvesting. And those who have to work the whole day, and from their childhood on, have no possibility of receiving a proper education—education not only in the sense of learning to read and write and to reckon but also the formation of character, which in a way is more important for Aristotle than the education given in schoolrooms.

Now would anyone in his senses who could help it wish to be ruled by uneducated people? The only way one can change the situation is to make sure that all people, all members of the community, belong to the leisure class. And that is now, it seems, becoming possible by virtue of the modern technological development, and therefore today we have a strong argument against Aristotle. The argument is a bit weakened in the eyes of some by the fact that this great development of technology includes the atomic bomb; so in other words, if Aristotle didn't solve that problem, we cannot be so sure that we have solved it. But let us not beat around the bush and make this argument that some people like: Democracy is fine, Aristotle is fine; hence, Aristotle must be happy in a democracy. I know you didn't mean it that way, but I know that this way of thinking is fostered by some people on this campus, even,ⁱⁱ and therefore I have to mention it.

Now the next point I would like to bring up, which you mentioned: the distinction between the good man and the good citizen. Unfortunately, I didn't know what you had said exactly: the good man is a good citizen under [. . .] condition?

Same Student: Yes.

LS: All right. Let us forget for one moment about this condition. That means, if these conditions are not given, the good man will be a bad citizen. This was not brought out by you. Out of [. . .] inclination toward propriety, but we have to also state the bad things.

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

ⁱⁱ Strauss refers apparently to Richard McKeon, Aristotle scholar and professor at the University of Chicago.

So the good man is in many cases a bad citizen. In the last century, and I think for a long part of this century, that appeared to be a fantastic statement due to all these great prejudices from which this man, Aristotle, suffered. But in our age that is elementary. I take just an example. Would it make sense to say that in Nazi Germany a good man had to be a bad citizen? It would make sense, wouldn't it? Because a good citizen in Nazi Germany is of course one hundred per cent Nazi. So in other words, what happened is this—and that is a fundamental reason why we begin to read Aristotle with a different eye than with those which he was read for some time, for a very long time—and that is that certain things which were taken for granted can no longer be taken for granted. Certain dikes have been removed. We are exposed to the same storms to which man always was exposed before modern security—and by this I mean not merely social security—before modern security took over: a time in which what we now call revolutions, what the ancients called risings, which by nature are death-bringing, are for us every day facts of life, though fortunately in this country we don't know much of it but we know enough from other contemporary nations to know what it means. The presence of this deathly danger gives Aristotle's doctrine an entirely different meaning.

When you say to men like Hobbes . . . was greatly concerned with these death-dealing matters, revolutions, there is no doubt about it. But what did Hobbes do? Hobbes tried to find a pattern, a gimmick, which would make impossible violent changes for all the future by his doctrine of [self-preservation]. We don't want to be killed. [. . .] make a strong state, a state so strong that there is no [chance] or [only] a very small chance of its being fought. The others¹ felt that Hobbes's device, gimmick, was not good enough because it meant also giving the reins to a Nero, if a Nero happens to be the strongest man around. Say, such men like Locke, or Rousseau later on: they tried also to find a gimmick, one and only one solution which would bring peace and security, and at the same time, as Locke and Rousseau thought, also justice. Now we have learned the hard way that this is not something which we can reckon upon. The chances are that there will always be regimes which make intelligible violent opposition to it—and make it even² [morally defensible]—and we have to face this imperfect solution. Even if it is true that there is such a thing like a perfect regime, the chances that it would be actualized anywhere, and in particular in our ancient country, are very small; therefore we have to face that. There is not the possibility of *the* solution to the political problem.

The theoretical way of expressing it is this. The key question for Aristotle is that of the regime—in Greek, *politeia*. Let me try to explain as simply as I can what the practical meaning of this thing is. Whenever we find a country, a city, or a state, it always is ruled by a specific kind of power. There is not simply the government, but it is always a specific kind of government: democratic, oligarchic, or what have you; and if you say these are old things, then say communist and democratic. That's the same problem—or fascist. There are perhaps other kinds of regimes even in our age. But at any rate, every *polis* is what it is by virtue of the regime which gives it its character, which permeates it. There are no limits to that permeation if we speak of a sphere of privacy in a liberal democracy. This privacy is not easy to define. Some sociologists of our age wrote books about democratic personality.ⁱⁱⁱ They meant by that that the individual, say, the husband or the father, if he is inspired

ⁱⁱⁱ The notion of a democratic personality followed from Theodor Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950). For works that Strauss might have had in mind, see, e.g., Harold Lasswell,

by the democratic spirit, will be different from a father in a so-called authoritarian regime. But the main point is this sphere of privacy—the home, the castle—and it is by its nature as much subject to permeation by the regime in a democracy as in another regime.

The official position at all times, in Aristotle's as well as in ours, is this: that there is such a thing as patriotism—I mean, expressed in that overstatement, "Right or wrong my country." So we are to give preference to our country, regardless. But if someone is, say, Nazi or a communist—an American I take as an example, and he would say "I am an American patriot, I wish the best for the American people," but the best for the American people is to become nazified or communistic, and he would act on it, he would then commit high treason. I mean, he would really act on it. In other words, what we expect in fact of a man is not merely loyalty to the country, naked as it were, to the rocks and meadows and rivers, but to the regime. Loyalty to the country is always mediated by loyalty to the regime, and these are very happy times if the question of the regime doesn't arise at all. It was thought for a long time it may, but our time is surely not such a time.

The point connected with this [is that] in a given society, all or almost all may be entirely satisfied with the regime, but there are always people in other countries, even in that case, who have different opinions about the regime. No regime is noncontroversial entirely. It may be noncontroversial in a given country, but it is surely controversial somewhere in the international scene. Since the *polis* is essentially determined by the regime, it means the political par excellence that is the regime is essentially controversial, even if by some good luck it does not happen to be controversial at a given time. Controversy may be nice and polite and restrained, but it has in itself the possibility of becoming unrestrained, and therefore one can say that the possibility of civil war is essential to the *polis*. That does not mean that it should, but without this possibility in front of us, one cannot understand the *polis*.

Stated now in a more simple way, or not starting from our [. . .] you have this situation when you see a *polis*. There are a large number of inhabitants—maybe ten thousand, maybe one hundred thousand, maybe millions—and not everyone, not every inhabitant, is a citizen. If there is slavery, the slaves are of course not citizens. The women were not citizens; the children were not citizens. But then in a nondemocratic regime—and resident aliens were not citizens—then the question arises: If every grownup male, natural-born citizen is a citizen, that's one possibility—that's democratic. Or you have a selective principle: you say only those who have a very small property qualification can be citizens. That would be the regime called by Aristotle "polity." Or a large property qualification, then it would be oligarchy. Or a qualification regarding marriage and/or family, then it would be an aristocracy. Or it would be a monarchy: only one man would [. . .]

The principle which Aristotle has for his distinction of regimes is this one, as Miss [. . .] stated it. There are two considerations. A regime is either good or bad, either directed toward the common good or directed toward the private good of the governors: first consideration. The second is numbers: one, few rulers, or many rulers. Now if you put these two considerations together, you get a list of six. This is the famous division of regimes which Aristotle made, and which is

Democratic Character (1951); Zevedei Barbu, *Democracy and Dictatorship: Their Psychology and Patterns of Life* (1956); Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the Common Man Believes What He Does* (1962).

fundamentally the same as that sketched by Plato in his dialogue the *Statesman*. The notion is that you start with kingship as the basis. This has not come out yet; we will see that. Kingship, aristocracy, polity; democracy, oligarchy, tyranny, because the corruption of the best and the worst. Therefore the corruption of the least good is least bad.

The point which did not come out in the paper, and which could not come out but which I have to make is this. Aristotle uses this scheme in order to guarantee the completeness of the scheme. One, few, many, all; that is complete. But he is not deceived about the unsatisfactory character of such a scheme, and he shows it immediately by his discussion of democracy and oligarchy, where he makes clear [that] the key point which distinguishes democracy and oligarchy, the most common forms of regime in his time, is not that in a democracy many or all rule, or in an oligarchy a few, but that³ a democracy [is] the rule of the poor and oligarchy is the rule of the rich; and only because it so happens that there is always few rich and many poor can one say oligarchy is the rule of the few and democracy the rule of the many.

Now this much as a general introduction. Now let us consider the details. It appears from the beginning of book 3 that we have not yet properly considered what a city is, despite this discussion [. . .] The reason is we have not yet considered what the *politeia*, the regime is; and in order to make this intelligible, Aristotle starts from a common way of speaking. The people say—for example, they say: The *polis* has done certain actions, made a certain contract. Others say: No, the *polis* has not done it, but the oligarchy has done it or the tyrant has done it. The latter would of course be said by the democrats after they came to power. The former government has made a [. . .] alone, and they say we don't pay that back. These dirty oligarchs or that dirty tyrant did it; the *polis* did not do it. It was interesting that Aristotle uses here an example of a way of speech which in this form would be a democratic way of speaking, and that is the point which Miss [. . .] saw. Only later [. . .] the first definition of the citizen given by Aristotle is a democratic definition. This does not mean that Aristotle is a democrat—he is not a democrat—but that the city has a certain propensity toward democracy, as is indicated by such places like *populus Romanus*, the Roman people; and in Greek, the *dēmos*, the *dēmos* and the *boulē*, the people and the Senate. There is such an inclination there.

But to come back to the primary theme now. In the first book Aristotle has discussed the city and its parts, but as parts he had understood the smaller communities. Now he discusses as parts of the city only the citizens. What is the difference between these two considerations? If you take the household as the smallest community which is a part of the *polis*, not all members of the household are full citizens: neither the slaves nor the children nor the wives are. So the political part of the household is the father and husband and master [. . .] individual, and therefore the more political consideration of the *polis* will not be so much concerned with the household as with the citizens, the adult males [. . .]

Therefore one must raise the question of what is a citizen. And here great difficulties arise which Aristotle discusses at length, but we do not have time to discuss that. But the key point here is the relativity to regime. A man who is a citizen in a democracy would not be a citizen in an oligarchy or aristocracy, and so on. The definition which Aristotle first suggests,⁴ namely, that a citizen is a man who is a member of the popular assembly and a judge in the lower courts or a jury man in the lower courts, is valid only in a democracy because there is no popular assembly in the nondemocratic

regimes, nor do they have these kind of juries which the democracies have. Let us read this somewhat difficult passage in 1275a33 following.

Reader:

Such more or less is the definition of ‘citizen’ that would best fit with all of those to whom the name is applied. But it must not be forgotten that things in the case of which the things to which they are related differ in kind, one of them being primary, another secondary and so on, either do not contain a common nature at all, as being what they are, or barely do so. Now we see that regimes differ from one another in kind, and that some are subsequent and others prior; for erroneous and divergent forms are necessarily subsequent to correct forms (in what sense we employ the term ‘divergent’ to regimes will appear later). Hence the citizen corresponding to each form of regime will also necessarily be different. Therefore— (1275a33-b3).

LS: Let us stop there. Aristotle makes here a general statement and applies it only to regimes. His general statement is this: that things whose substrata differ in kind and where there is a prior and second and third and so on, such things have nothing or little in common. Now what is an example? Let us take an example first of the things whose substrata differ in kind and where there is no prior or posterior. A simple example would be feathers and birds. Feathers always require a substratum, unless they are lost. The substratum is a bird. But there is no bird [of] which you can say, [for example], the eagle or the vulture: That is the bird of the highest order; and a hawk, for that matter—and a⁵ [hawk] is a bird of the second order. So they are all equally birds, and therefore⁶ there is nothing in common between these feathers except [when they are] without⁷ [birds].

An example of things whose substratum differs in kind and where there is however a first and second and so on: and the example here is hand, the living hand, the [. . .] the hand cut off, and the painted hand. The hand cut off is no longer truly a hand; the painted hand even less, and yet it can be called a hand. The substrata are here different in kind. And now to apply this to the regime, the citizen and the regime: every citizen is a citizen by virtue of the regime to which he belongs, but the regimes differ in kind and in such a way that some regimes are prior and others are posterior—true regimes and questionable regimes, let us say; and therefore there is very little in common between the citizens of a good regime and the citizens of a bad regime. That is the point which Aristotle tries to make here. What is common to all regimes is of little importance. What is important is distinctive and hence controversial, and this is the root of the fact that the word political as such indicates something controversial. Today the most obvious examples are of course communism and liberal democracy. In both cases, communism and liberal democracy, we find governments, law courts, armies, navies, air forces, agriculture, industry, science, circuses, ballerinas and what have you, but they have very little in common nevertheless. That is what Aristotle says. Why? In our language, we would say the spirit differs: to the extent to which these things are affected by the regime,⁸ their spirit must be radically different. Where we speak of spirit, Aristotle would say the end pursued differs. A liberal democracy pursues other ends than communism, and therefore everything belonging to a liberal democracy, subject to its influence and inspiration, is radically different.

If I may mention in passing the scientific political science as it is usually practiced has the tendency to regard as most important what is common to all regimes and not the distinctive, and this is the reason why this approach to political things is so remote from that of the citizen. We can say it looks at political things in the perspective of certain kinds of beholders as distinguished from the perspective of the citizen. Then he has a nice discussion here in 1275b22.

Reader:

But in practice citizenship is limited to the child of citizens on both sides, not on one side only, that is, the child of the citizen father or the citizen mother; and other people carry this requirement further back, for example to the second or the third preceding generation or further. But given this as a practical and hasty definition, some people raise the difficulty, How will that ancestor three or four generations back have been a citizen? Gorgias of Leontini therefore, partly perhaps in genuine perplexity but partly in jest, said that just as the vessels made by mortar-makers were mortars, so the citizens made by the magistrates were Larisaeans—

LS: Meaning by the magistrates of Larisa.

Reader:

since some of the magistrates were actually larisa-makers. But it is really a simple matter; for if they possessed citizenship in the manner stated in our definition of a citizen, they were citizens—since it is clearly impossible to apply the qualification of descent from a citizen father or mother to the original colonizers or founders of the city. (1275b22-34)

LS: Yes, and that is its [. . .] reputation. Now what is the point? A political and hasty definition—hasty meaning without any theoretical reflection—simply good enough for practical purposes to say a citizen is the son of a citizen father and a citizen mother. What does this mean? Gorgias, the famous teacher of rhetoric, made this objection, and he said that is the meaning of this thing: no citizen is really a natural-born, as you would say if a citizen is a father and a she-citizen is a mother; they produce a citizen with the same necessity as a stallion and a mare produce a horse. That is not so simple. Who is and who is not a citizen is arbitrarily defined, whereas it is not arbitrarily defined who is and who is not a horse. That is determined by the *nomos*, who is and who is not a citizen.

Aristotle refutes his practical definition by the simple consideration: What about the first citizens, the founders? The Mayflower people would be the citizens *par excellence*, but they could not yet have been citizens of the city which did not exist; and so a definition of the city, of the citizen which is not applicable to the first founders is surely from every point of view impossible. And therefore the only thing is to forget about this practical definition⁹, which may be all right for practical purposes, and simply say: Define it as Aristotle said, as someone who participates in deliberative and judicial or who has a right to participate and deliberate in deliberative and judicial functions for the community.

In the sequel Aristotle makes clear one point, in the immediate sequel. There is something which is of course common to all regimes, and which is not [. . .] namely, in all regimes there is a government; there are rulers. Even if you say [that] in certain regimes, say, in a tyranny, the tyrant rules unjustly, nevertheless he rules, and you cannot disregard this fact if you do not wish to be completely at variance with what is.

Student: Can a regime define a citizen, and define it in such a way that he is not one who takes part in judicial functions? And couldn't he still be a citizen if the definition of citizenship didn't include this?

LS: Give me an example.

Same Student: An example is that all people who have blue eyes are citizens and vote but can't hold positions of office in the regime. They cannot hold positions of authority . . .

LS: That is one possibility. That is surely a kind of mixture between an oligarchy and a democracy, insofar as the right to vote is given to everybody . . .

Same Student: Isn't the definition open-ended in a certain sense? In other words, wouldn't . . .

LS: Well, it is not open-ended to some extent, because a man might see whether his wife is blue-eyed in order to hope that his children might become [citizens]^{iv}, but otherwise it is not. For those who have already been generated, it is definitely not open-ended. That could be, but all kinds of principles could be. But this is not, say, a racially . . .

Same Student: There seems to be a tension between Aristotle's definition of someone who takes part in the judicial tasks or tasks of the government and the definition of citizenship by any regime. In other words, how can he say that people have to do this to be citizens when the definition of citizenship itself is a product of the regime and not of Aristotle?

LS: Of course not of Aristotle, that would be a mere [. . .] But I still do not see your point. Wherever you look, you find that there is ¹⁰a type of people in control and [who] give the laws and is ultimately in charge of the law court and so on. That you find everywhere. There are various principles according to which people belong to that governing group, governing body, and they differ. Now¹¹ there is a possibility not considered by Aristotle—I understand what you say—that¹² everyone, so to speak, may be a voting citizen but only a part of them may become members of the government. The reason that Aristotle does not discuss it is because he does not know of representative government, I believe. That is the simple reason. For example, if you have an arrangement that everyone twenty years old can vote, but he cannot be voted into office before the age of thirty—a very simple and frequent thing. Now this presupposes and is actually made in modern times in representative governments. Aristotle has in mind in the case of democracy, direct democracy, the whole citizen body assembled, and everyone who is a citizen by this very fact can be voted into office. The reason why this is so is because quite a few offices

^{iv} The transcript has ellipses here.

[. . .] quite a few were determined by lot. The lot cannot make a distinction between whether a man is twenty or twenty-five or whatever the age may be.

Same Student: [. . .] in which only the one rules for himself, would there only be one citizen? In other words, would he be the only citizen?

LS: That would not be called that way because that would make unnecessary bad luck, but if a citizen means someone who has a share in the ruling of the community, and if he is not misguided by the word citizen, the mere word citizen, then he is the only citizen. The same would pass in an absolute monarchy, which is not [. . .] We [will] come to that. But the question of various kingdoms, especially of tyranny, will come up later. Now let us turn to 1276a6.

Reader:

When is an occurrence an act of the state, of the city and when is it not? For example, when the government has been altered from oligarchy or tyranny to democracy. In such circumstances some people claim that the new regime should not discharge public debts, on the ground that the money was borrowed by the tyrant and not by the city, and should repudiate many other similar claims also, because some regimes^v rest upon force and others are not aimed at the welfare of the community. If therefore some democracies also are governed in that matter, the acts of the authorities in their case can only be said to be the acts of the city in the same sense as the public acts emanating from the oligarchy or the tyranny are said to be.

LS: In other words, Aristotle opposes here certain dogmatic democrats who say when there is an oligarchy or a tyranny there is no *polis*, and therefore if the oligarchs or the tyrant [borrow money], that's not a public debt. If this is valid because of the unjust character of this regime, then it¹³ may very well be valid of a democracy—which also may happen to be unjust,¹⁴ as we shall see later, and therefore we must put the question on a broader basis. Now these people say, in other words, when there is no democracy, there is no *polis*. There is another kind of man, let us call him the simple patriot, who would say if the *polis* is always there (say, Athens), only the regime has changed. And that is a rather superficial change: it remains always the same city. Whether Britain [. . .] under Alfred the Great, or under Elizabeth I or Elizabeth II, it is all the same: good old Britain. And let us call them the patriots [. . .] the country, and not the regime.

Now where does Aristotle stand? Aristotle's solution to this question is this. The democrats in this case are wrong. When there is an oligarchy, tyranny, aristocracy or what have you instead of a democracy in a city, there is still a city but it is another city. So the change of regime does not bring about the destruction of the city as the dogmatic democrat believes. It brings about a different city, and therefore the patriot, the simple patriot, is not correct. He underestimates the incisive and decisive importance of a change of regime. In the simplest formula I think everyone can understand: Let us assume a city is dedicated at a given time to flagrant injustice in every respect, to tyranny, and then by an act of tyrannicidal [. . .] the best men of the community come to the fore, men like [. . .] in Thebes. Let us call it an aristocracy. Then this is a change from vice to virtue. Which change can be compared in importance to that change?

^v Rackham has "forms of government."

Therefore, the regime and the changes of regime are in a way more important than the continuity that the same material, so to speak: same human beings, same forests, same rivers, are the matter of the country as it were before. One can say this. There are three possibilities. There is a point of view of the patriot, which is easy to understand. Then there is the point of view of the partisan, who would say: When my favorite regime doesn't exist, there is no *polis* in any respectable sense. And then there is a third possibility, and that is Aristotle, and that we can call the partisan of virtue. Aristotle says if the best regime is not actual, there is still a regime there, but the presence of regime cannot vouch for the presence of the *polis*. It is a *polis*, but a different *polis*. Yes?

Student: Is it true then if the regime is run efficiently, it may not matter to noncitizens, particularly for women, children, slaves, laborers, what type of regime it is?

LS: They would under no circumstances be citizens.

Same Student: So the only people it would affect are people who would be citizens or not citizens depending upon the regime.

LS: Yes, but not quite, because for example under an aristocracy, to mention examples Aristotle later gives, there would be greater concern for public propriety than in a democracy, and this would affect the behavior of women. There would be a magistrate who would see whether there are women, especially wives of citizens, who behave properly and who don't, and the same applies also to children, so it would [. . .] and also the posture toward slaves. If there is a more decent regime, more humane regime, the posture would be different than if it is a [. . .] regime. But that is not the primary concern, that is true, but it would affect it.

Same Student: So in fact some social and economic structure are different from [. . .] regime.

LS: What do you mean, "the social and economic structure"? When Aristotle says, as he in fact says, the fundamental cleavage within every *polis* [is between] the rich and the poor, this is a social or economic distinction, isn't it? This social or economic distinction becomes political because each of these two groups desires to rule. This makes it political, and one or the other or a combination of the two will have been [. . .] in ruling the city. You presuppose a certain criticism of Aristotle's view according to which the real stuff of politics is the social and economic, and the political is only a kind of surface phenomenon, a kind of superstructure. Aristotle would say about this superstructure that it gives the whole thing its character: only by the so-called superstructure does a thing become complete. Prior to that, as long as there is¹⁵ turmoil and the question is undecided,¹⁶ [it] is not yet¹⁷ clear what regime it has. The whole society does not yet have a clear character.

Student: I'd like to raise a question about your statement that Aristotle believed that what is essentially common to all regimes is unimportant, and your critique of modern social science as in a way dealing too much with what is common to all regimes. I think this in a way is slightly misleading, and this is the reason. It seems to me that fundamental to Aristotle's enterprise is [. . .] in discovering the nature of things is to discover the *eidos* or the class to which they belong.

Now in this sense, Aristotelian science, as well as any science, must discover what is common among things, whether it is an evaluating science or modern science. It is possible to fault social science for failing to make the distinction between nature and convention but not, I don't think, to simply say that its fault lies in trying to discover what is common among things.

LS: That is as vague as if someone would say: I'm against abstractions. We cannot think without abstractions, and what is wrong with abstractions is only that some people abstract from the essential. Now that is the point [. . .] the common, but the relevant common or the irrelevant common, and what Aristotle says [is that] the relevant common is specifically political, say, the character of a democracy, the character of an oligarchy, the character of a tyranny. And if there are important subdivisions of democracy, as Aristotle maintains, then these important subdivisions. But if we¹⁸ try to understand a given regime in terms of what is common to all regimes, this specific common will evaporate. I have read occasionally statements where you got this notion from. In every political order there is some coercion and some freedom, because in Nazi Germany even, and in Soviet Russia, there is some freedom of thought.

So the question is only if you want to know what these regimes are,¹⁹ you tell if possible in terms of percentages how great a percentage of freedom and how great a percentage of coercion there is. So then the common denominator which comes through [. . .] freedom and coercion would then nevertheless—even if the difference would be very great, say, in one case sixty and forty, and in another case twenty and eighty—would nevertheless be leveled, and the glaring difference which is visible on the surface, what we call free elections, which has to be defined but crudely [. . .] and the absence of free elections is not visible in this kind of schematism where a deduction to a common denominator or common denominators is made.

Same Student: I agree with you, but I simply don't think that the activity for which you are criticizing social scientists is²⁰ necessarily intrinsic to modern social science.

LS: I believe it is, and I believe you know this. Why is there so much concern with small groups? Some people have the notion—after all, all societies, however big, are groupings of human[s], and it is quite reasonable a procedure at first sight to start always with the smaller. Just as we begin with the cell in living beings, why should we not begin with a small group? That makes sense. But then a moment's [reflection] shows that if you study small groups, say, in this country,²¹ where you can have the easiest access—it's hard to study small groups in China or even in Russia, or in North Vietnam—and the question is: Is not a small group in each case already colored by the regime within which it occurs? So that it's really not the prior thing from which to start, but the prior thing is rather a regime which is the character-giving, the form-giving [thing]. I think there is a tendency, because in one way or another modern social science tries to take its bearings by the procedure of the natural sciences, the modern natural sciences.

Same Student: I think this is very true in the field of studying non-Western governments. There are many scholars today, outstandingly [. . .] who take non-Western societies, whether they be in India or in China or Peru or anywhere, and they make charts, and they say: Well, in

some of these societies they have extreme punishments and in others they don't; in some societies they have lots of irrigation and in others they don't. And they put these into one category as opposed to the Western societies, and it's very unnatural . . .

LS: You may very well be right, but the only thing is Wittfogel is not a typical social scientist.^{vi} He's a very funny fellow.

Student: From your description of Aristotle—tell me if I'm wrong, but I get the impression that the most political thing or the element of the polity which is political is [. . .] formal or the structural relationships among men. Political as such²² isn't a substantive category. There's no political action apart from the structure.

LS: This is not true?

Same Student: My impression is that if the city is for the good life or the good end, then it seems like it must be . . .

LS: Unfortunately, not all cities or their modern equivalents are dedicated to the good life, so we have to take it, if we want to be political scientists, in Aristotle's [. . .] we have to consider also the imperfect societies, number one. Now what is a political act? Give me an example.

Same Student: Deciding to embark on a just war . . .

LS: This is not a thing which the ordinary citizen does every day . . .but let us take voting, which every citizen is supposed to do: But does this not depend on the regime? I mean, whether you have a choice or maybe only an echo; but still, a country in which there is not even an echo, is there not a difference?

Student: Is this what makes the good life?

LS: We [will] come to the good life, but what is the question we are discussing now? The question is: Is the regime truly the key to political phenomena? In other words, are there not things which are political, and politically important, and yet not related to the regime? I would say yes that could be, and a simple example would be you have a society whose very existence depends on irrigation systems, so of course it can be expected that every regime will preserve the irrigation system, and that is in this sense politically neutral. Or one can²³ also say to have an army is regarded as necessary by practically every regime because we have not yet seen a pacifist regime in practice. There are things which are politically neutral; therefore, people do not fight about them: they fight about the control of the army—that's something different—but not about the fact of an army. So they are politically neutral, there is no question. But what gives political life its flavor and character is the politically distinctive, and that is the regime or the various appurtenances of regime. When you speak now in this

^{vi} Karl August Wittfogel, whose best-known book is *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957). He argues that the need for extensive irrigation in some lands produced centralized authoritarian empires that were hostile to change.

country of conservatives and liberals, they are both dedicated to liberal democracy, but to somewhat different versions of liberal democracy, and for a variety of reasons, some honorable and some not. People do not [. . .] with the utmost gravity and exactitude, but everyone who has a feel for this kind of thing knows more or less the difference between the conservative version and the liberal version of democracy in this country. These are very important subdivisions, but still the agreement regarding liberal democracy as such is by no means negligible, as we would see when we were really threatened seriously by a group trying to abolish liberal democracy. I hope we never make this experience.

Now let us turn to another passage, 1276a35, when he says here, “Let us take the same human beings inhabiting the same place.”

Reader:

But are we to pronounce a city, where the same population inhabit the same place, to be the same city so long as the population are of the same race, in spite of the fact that all the time some are dying and others are being born, just as it is our custom to say that a river or a spring is the same river or spring although one stream of water is always being added to and the other being withdrawn from it, or are we to say that though the people are the same people for the similar reason of continuity, yet the city is a different city? For inasmuch as the city is a kind of partnership, and is in fact a partnership of citizens in a government—

LS: Regime.

Reader:

when the regime^{vii} has been altered and is different it would appear to follow that the city is no longer the same city, just as we say that a chorus which on one occasion acts a comedy and in another a tragedy is a different chorus although it is also composed of the same persons. (1276a33-1276b6)

LS: This is a clear example. You have, say, fifteen men. The same fifteen men play today a comedy and tomorrow a tragedy. They are the same men, and today they are a comic chorus and tomorrow a tragic chorus: they are different choruses. Similarly, if the inhabitants of a *polis* play or are organized now according to the principle of democracy, and tomorrow according to the principle of oligarchy, they are different cities.

The question which Aristotle still has in mind—one point I must mention. Aristotle has been accused of being unaware or blind to the continuity of the city despite the changes of the regime. Think [of] when we say British constitutional history from Alfred the Great or beyond to Elizabeth II: same Britain, different regimes. Now how could Aristotle ever have blinded himself of these things? That is of course nonsense. Aristotle knew that²⁴ one can look at the city as continuous, but then one does not look at it from a political point of view but from a mere historian’s or [. . .] point of view which is not his, which has a certain usefulness or subordinate purposes but is not any longer political.

^{vii} Rackham has “form of the government.”

The question as to what one should do practically in the case of a change of regime is not answered by Aristotle, and he doesn't answer it [. . .] should they pay the public debts, should they pay the debt incurred by the tyrant or not, is not answered by Aristotle, not because he doesn't recognize it but because it is not pertinent to the subject matter. And I think everyone can guess Aristotle's answer to that question, if he makes one assumption. Aristotle was a fair-minded man, and then it follows, surely, surer than the night follows the day or the day the night, that if the debt was incurred by the tyrant for building streets or hospitals²⁵, from which the citizen body benefits, then it is the duty of the citizens to pay for that although they didn't authorize it. But if he did it only in order to [. . .] and keep content his yes-men or bodyguards, then of course not a penny is to be paid to these fools who [. . .] So there is no difficulty in that.

Now this question which causes quite a few difficulties to modern readers: the distinction between the good citizen and the good man. The good citizen is relative to the regime, i.e., a good democrat is not a good oligarch. That goes without saying. A good communist is not a good liberal democrat. Who can ever doubt that? So the good citizen is relative to the regime, but the good man is not relative; and from this it follows that the good man as good man is something different from the good citizen as good citizen. And the question arises: Do not the two things coincide under certain conditions? And Aristotle answers this question in the affirmative: A good man is a man dedicated to virtue. I leave it at the ordinary understanding of virtue. Therefore he cannot identify himself with a regime which is not characterized by dedication to virtue, so he will be a good citizen only in, say, an aristocratic regime, in a regime dedicated to virtue.

And then there follows a somewhat more subtle question: Is every good citizen of an aristocratic city necessarily a good man? And Aristotle denies that, because good men are not so frequent as to form a citizen body of any regime. That's one reason he indicates. But the other is this. To be a good man means to exercise your goodness, to show it by deeds. Now the good man cannot show this excellence as a human being even in a good regime if he is not in a ruling position. Certain qualities of his are in a state of dormancy if he does not rule. Aristotle gives this example. The ruler needs—the man in actual ruling office needs the quality of practical wisdom of the highest sense, prudence [. . .] But the man who is not in a magistracy does not need it, [does not] need practical wisdom in the highest sense. As a matter of fact, he cannot use it. Think of this case. To form judgment about a great matter, you must have access to all kinds of information which in some very important cases is restricted to the highest men, men occupying the highest offices, and therefore there is no possibility of truly exercising one's practical wisdom regarding such great matters.

Student: I am not sure, but there seems to be a bit of circularity in Aristotle's argument. According to his definition of citizenship, it is one who participates in ruling. So if one is a citizen, he automatically participates in ruling, and therefore all the citizens of a good regime . . .

LS: That is too schematic. Aristotle has never [. . .] No. What does he mean? Participate in ruling, that²⁶ is defined for Aristotle as participating in a democracy, participating in the deliberative assembly, which is also the legislative assembly, and participating in lower courts. But there is also what we now call the executive branch of government, what Aristotle calls the magistracies. This

is always a smaller group of men, and the question in some of them requires special qualities, where not everybody can be elected. In Athens in the most democratic time there were two offices to which people were not elected by lot. Election by lot, as we shall see later, is the most democratic method, because lot doesn't make any distinction between Miller and Smith. You see that? And therefore there was another method: that is what we mean now today by voting, and they called that election by raising [. . .] which means you vote for this man. In this case, you consider of course always the qualities of the man; you discriminate, and it's undemocratic. A democracy has to be practical, and therefore there were two kinds of offices to which people were not elected by lot: and these were generalship—and that would be tough, to choose one's generals by lot; and the man in charge of the treasury. And therefore²⁷—Aristotle discusses that later on in the book: What are the qualities that the general must have, and what are the qualities that the treasurer must have? Therefore, I think that men are surprised [. . .]

There is one point which we should read in 1278[a]37 to 40—at the end of 37.

Reader:

'Like to some alien settler without honor,—' since a native not admitted to a share in the public honors is like an alien domiciled in the public^{viii} land. But in some places this exclusion is disguised, for the purpose of deceiving those who are a part of the population.

LS: So you see Aristotle was aware of the fact, and there is later on a chapter devoted to this question, to the tricks by which men or citizens are deceived about the character of the regime. I give one example, a very simple one: to say every freeborn man is a citizen, but he must of course have gone through the state educational system, otherwise, it is not good enough. But the poor, and that meant the majority, cannot have their children go through that system because they need them on the farm or wherever, and hence this equal law excludes say two-thirds of the population from full citizenship. You can do that, and there are other devices which Aristotle discusses.

Student: At the very end of this section, he says that those who direct or are people who are directing [. . .] in other words, the identity of a good citizen and a good man is true of those whose potential [. . .] are capable of . . .

LS: You mean in the same paragraph?

Same Student: Yes.

LS: Read it again, Mr. [. . .].

Reader:

Is the goodness that makes a good man to be deemed the same as that which makes a worthy citizen, or different? It is now clear from what has been said: in one regime^{ix} the good man and the good citizen are the same, but in another they are different, and also in the former case it is

^{viii} The reader adds the word "public" here, which is not found in the Rackham translation.

^{ix} Rackham has "form of state."

not every citizen but only the statesman, the man who controls or is competent to control.
(1278a40-b3)

LS: That is the qualification which he now has. Yes, that is true, but still only as an actual or potential ruler. That is the key there. If he is, to the extent to which he is not even a potential ruler because he lacks the qualities, the good man and the good citizen cannot be enough. He is not a good man because he lacks those qualities which would enable him when his turn comes to be a ruler.

Same Student: But in an ideal aristocracy . . .

LS: Even in an aristocracy not all members of the ruling class will be elected to the really decisive offices. More than some individuals are quite inept, but they are nice, don't steal and so, but they could not be permitted to have any decisive say. There is one passage which—well, there are many things, as a matter of fact. I think that's the last thing we'll read. A little bit later in b25, he says again that man is by nature a political animal; and then a little bit later in 25 [that] man has two motives for living together: first, because they are by nature social beings, or political beings as Aristotle says; and the other is sheer desire for living or self-preservation, as it was later on called. Do you have that?

Reader:

The good life then is the chief thing of society, both collectively for all its members and individually; but they also come together and maintain the political partnership for the sake of life merely, for doubtless there is some element of value contained in the mere state of being alive, provided that there is not too great an excess on the side of the hardships of life, and it is clear that the many^x of mankind cling to life at the cost of enduring much suffering, which shows that life contains some measure of well-being and a sweetness in its essential nature. (1278b23-30)

LS: That is Aristotle's way of speaking about the same phenomenon which was important to Hobbes, but which Hobbes stated in very different terms. Do you remember the Hobbean expression?

Student: That the greatest evil is a violent death.

LS: A violent death. Aristotle speaks of a natural sweetness belonging to life. That is quite a difference. There is one question which we must have brought up last time and which we would have been unable to discuss²⁸ this time because the material is not available, and that is this. We have heard that the *polis* is natural, by nature. And now we have this immense complication that there is not the *polis*, but the *polis* is always established by regime and there is a great variety of regimes. If the *polis* is natural, it would seem that the regime must be natural, and that would simply mean that the variety of regimes, all the world's regimes, are natural. How does Aristotle solve this question? We will find the answer in next time's assignment.

^x Rackham has "mass."

Session 8: November 1, 1967
Book 3, chapters 7–18

Leo Strauss: Before I address a question to you, I would like to return the paper of Mr. [. . .].ⁱ Your paper was very good, I thought. I had one question. It is not clear why Aristotle derives the first and best definition of the citizen from observation of democracies. The first definition it is, but does he say the best?

Student: He says the definition which is almost the best for . . .

LS: Yes, but it doesn't prove to be adequate and he replaces it, but it is the first. How should your question be answered? Only one point: what we call political philosophy emerged in Athens, which at that time was a democracy, and there is perhaps some connection between these two facts, political philosophy and a democratic environment. And so you see this is the answer to your question. Today we will find another passage which answers your questions.

Same Student: On the point you just mentioned, on the relation between political philosophy and environment of democracy, will we come back to it later? I'd like you to explore it.

LS: All right, lest we forget: when you take the most extreme statement that is to be found in Plato's *Republic*, and there you have an order of regimes which is not identical with that which is found in Aristotle but starts with kingship or aristocracy, then what he called the timocracy, then oligarchy, then democracy, then tyranny. Now¹ the criterion for goodness there is a regime in which the best kind of man is possible, and the best kind of man is possible and can live without his being disturbed. The first is, of course, when the philosophers are kings. This is called kingship or aristocracy in the *Republic*. The other in which philosophers can live is democracy, because of this terrible vice of democracy, that it is in our language the most permissive of all regimes: it permits all kinds of vices, but also all kinds of good things, and therefore a philosopher can live there [. . .] Socrates, who was indeed executed—but only when he was seventy, which meant he could spend his whole life in the democracy. And so this is another specification of [. . .] kinship between that political philosophy which is very critical of democracy and democracy.

Now to turn to Mr. [. . .]'s paper. You mention among other things there Aristotle's questioning of the analogy with the arts. This is an argument occurring constantly in the Platonic dialogues and directed against democracy. We trust the experts. The experts are always a small minority, and therefore democracy, which is the rule of all, contradicts this general rule of prudence that we should listen to the wise, to the experts. By the way, this problem exists in our day again in the question of democracy and technocracy, or technical bureaucracy. How does Aristotle dispose of it in the section under discussion?

Student: I'm not sure exactly which section you refer to—the discussion of the doctors?

ⁱ Strauss responds to two student papers, one of which was apparently read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

LS: No, the other one, the one which comes first. If one had to be an expert to judge, then indeed the rule of the many or all would be impossible. But is the expert the best judge?

Same Student: I think that throughout, the way a democracy could emerge well is that the nature of an expert in these concerns derives largely out of goodness, and in his discussion of goodness emerging through collectively discussing things among the masses, that the people can arrive at a great deal of goodness that doesn't exist in them separately. They thus become an expert collectively.

LS: Yes, but still limiting ourselves to this argument, is the expert the best judge? Aristotle questions that. He gives some everyday examples. Who is the best judge of a dinner?

Same Student: The diner.

LS: And he is not the cook? And how do we call the kind of people like the diner in this particular case?

Same Student: Consumers?

LS: The users—and not the producers. The users would never produce the thing, but he is the best judge. Just as a chair, by sitting in it, we see whether it is a good or a bad chair. This is indeed a powerful argument, but how come it did not impress Socrates or Plato as much as it impressed Aristotle, at least in this particular passage?

Same Student: Politics isn't an art that produces things. It is a different kind of art. It doesn't have an end product beyond itself.

LS: All right. Let us give the legislative function, the deliberative function to the experts, but the assembly, the popular assembly, decides finally on the decisions of the experts. That is what we understand today, more or less, by democracy. And why not? Because they are the judges. They suffer from the follies or the rashness of the rulers. Why did this not impress Plato?

Same Student: He was more inclined to believe that the users would be misled by the pleasant than by their own good.

LS: Yes. If we take the example of the dinner, the user might very well be the best judge of what pleases him most. But what is best for him? Again, the experts make the decision. I will have another example of Aristotle's criticism of the arts as models. You remember that, in the discussion with Hippodamus, whether inventions should be encouraged because inventions have been so eminently good in the arts, where Aristotle also questioned that analogy—does any one of you remember it?

Student: In reference to new things being created . . .

LS: In the arts, the innovation, the improvements are evidently good, but in the law, in legislation, that is not so because the laws owe their power not to the intrinsic evidence of the laws but to habit. As a common thing is, the questioning of the model character of the arts, and we find other examples of that on the part of Aristotle.ⁱⁱ

Student: Why is changing the arts intrinsic to the good?

LS: You have, say, multiple sclerosis, and then some physician discovers a cure for it, and that is evidently a progress in medicine, just as being regarded as a progress in medicine that it is possible to take care of pneumonia. If the question comes up whether the overall progress of medicine doesn't have deleterious effects, yes, that is beyond the capacity of medicine, of any special art. That is not the matter. The point which Aristotle wants to make here is only this: that there is a radical difference between laws as laws and arts as arts, because in art, progress within the art is evident, but in the case of law, the evidence of the laws such as they have is not the ground for the validity of the law. They owe their validity to custom.

We have not discussed a few very important passages which belong to last time's assignment. I believe we begin at 1280a22, this great conflict within the *polis*. You have a society of men qualitatively different: the rich, the poor, the men of noble birth, and also the men of virtue. The men of virtue may also be found among the others, but as men of virtue they are classified themselves. All of them claim that their rule would be best for all—and that is the eternal situation within political society, that it consists of a variety of qualitatively different parts, each claiming preeminence. Aristotle takes very seriously what they say, and what they say is this: We are superior in money, in wealth. That's what the rich say. But then they commit the error of saying they are unqualifiedly superior because they are superior in some respects. And the others, the many, say, "We are equal in a certain respect, we are all freeborn citizens," and they therefore claim wrongly to be equal in every respect. That was the point he had made in 1280a25. But the most important point they do not say. Do you have this?

Reader:

But the most important thing they do not mention. If men formed the community and came together for the sake of wealth, their share in the city is proportionate to their share in the property, so that the argument of the champions of oligarchy would appear to be valid—

LS: In other words, if the city were [. . .] a shareholding society, then one would say each gets as much out of the city as he puts into it.

Reader:

namely that in a partnership with a capital of 100 minae it would not be just for the man who contributed one mina to have a share, whether of the principal or of the profits accruing equal to the share of the man who supplied the whole of the remainder; but if on

ⁱⁱ This sentence is as it appears in the transcript. The sentence as we have it is unclear, but it seems to convey that it is not unusual for Aristotle, and perhaps for others, to question the suitability of the arts as models for politics.

the other hand the city was formed not for the sake of life merelyⁱⁱⁱ but rather for the good life (for otherwise a collection of slaves or of lower animals would be a city, but as it is, it is not a city, because slaves and animals have no share in well-being or in purposive life)—(1280a25-34)

LS: “Happiness” would be a more literal translation.

Reader:

no share in happiness. And if its object is not military alliance for defense against injury by anybody, and it does not exist for the sake of trade and of business relations—for if so, Etruscans and Carthaginians and all the people that have commercial relations with one another would be virtually citizens of a single city—

LS: That is as if someone would say today Russians and Americans would be members of the same society because they have some trade between them. Yes?

Reader:

at all events they have agreements about imports and covenants as to abstaining from dishonesty and treaties of alliance for mutual defense; but they do not have officials common to them all appointed to enforce these covenants, but different officials with either party, nor yet does either party take any concern as to the proper moral character of the other, nor attempt to secure that nobody in the cities under the covenant shall be dishonest or in any way immoral, but only that they shall not commit any wrong against each other.

LS: Listen carefully to this sentence: “only that they shall not commit any wrong against each other.” Go on.

Reader:

All those on the other hand who are concerned about good government do take civic virtue and vice into their purview. Thus it is also clear that any city that is truly so called and is not a city merely in name must pay attention to virtue; for otherwise the community becomes merely an alliance, differing only in locality from the other alliances, those of allies that live apart. And the law is a covenant or, in the phrase of the sophist Lycophron, a guarantee of men’s just claims on one another, but it is not designed to make the citizens virtuous and just. (1280a34-b13)

LS: Here Aristotle engages in a polemic against a view that became very powerful long after his time, and it is very powerful. You know it, I’m sure, this alternative view which Aristotle attacks, namely, that the city is an alliance for the sake of defense of life and is to prevent wrongdoing but does not have any concern in making men good or noble. What is that view?

Student: Hobbes.

LS. Hobbes, Locke, the modern view, the typically modern view. The view was already known

ⁱⁱⁱ Rackham has “only.”

in classical antiquity, as you see here from the criticism of this particular man Lycophron, but we have no reason to assume that it had acquired this elaborate version which it had in modern times; in other words, it was connected with the doctrine of natural rights. There is no suggestion of this kind. But the narrow view of the function of civil society is the same, and clearly opposed to the view of Aristotle as well as of Plato. Would you like to make any further remark on this subject?

Student: It also contains the view that is popularized by commercial business interests, which is predominant really more than Hobbes is in some respects.

LS: This is very true, but how can we state this in the simplest form? The relation between the Hobbean view and this commercial view.

Same Student: Life, liberty, and the pursuit of pleasure.

LS: No, a still better formulation which I took from Locke: self-preservation.

Same Student: And then there is comfort.

LS: Comfortable self-preservation. You may preserve yourself by sleeping on hard rocks and by killing such animals as attack you or as you would like to eat, but you preserve yourself much better if you live in a comfortable house and have a comfortable dinner. The difference is practically very important, between self-preservation and comfortable self-preservation. But the principle is the same, because Hobbes himself, who took no objection whatever to comfortable self-preservation if you can have it; and Locke on the other hand admitted of course that you cannot have comfortable self-preservation always under all conditions, and yet the fundamental point is the right to self-preservation. This, therefore, is the criterion: that part of the *polis* which is most conducive for the moral quality, moral tone of the *polis*, that should have the decisive say.

Student: How does that square with Aristotle saying that the city is not holy?

LS: For the very simple reason that moral virtue has nothing to do with piety. In Aristotle's list of virtues in the *Ethics* we do not find piety. That is the simple answer. Let us read on the same subject in 1281a, the beginning. "The city is a community of."

Reader:

clans and villages in a full and independent life, which in our view constitutes a happy and noble life; the political fellowship must therefore be deemed to exist for the sake of noble actions, not merely for living in common. Hence those who contribute most— (1281a1-4)

LS: May I only add one point with this question of Hobbes and Locke: Locke explicitly rejects this view that civil society is for the purpose of virtue. May I remind you of one point which we do not see, because this struggle has been fought out in the seventeenth century and we have it long behind us, and therefore we can afford to forget it? If you make the end of civil society

virtue, then much of what we call freedom becomes questionable. Take such a simple case as that of censorship. If virtue is the end of civil society, there may very well be severe limitations of freedom of what is now called freedom of expression in pictures and in speeches. Therefore, one can say freedom and virtue are, in modern times at any rate, poles. There is no simple harmony between them. The classics took virtue as the end and freedom only within the limits within which it is compatible with virtue. In the modern doctrines, freedom comes first. The necessity of virtue is of course admitted, but it must see how it will find its place in the marketplace. The primary concern of the political thinker is not to establish a sure place for virtue. Now read on where you left off.

Reader:

Hence those who contribute most to such fellowship have a larger part in the city than those who are their equals or superiors in freedom and birth but not their equals in civic virtue, or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in virtue. (1281a4-7)

LS: You see here he uses in passing virtue and political virtue synonymously. That is not unimportant. One can say this is very simple, and [it] makes sense that the best men should be in control of the society because this will be good not only for them but for all others. But, unfortunately, the best men are not necessarily the most powerful men, practically or otherwise; and in addition it is not so easy to know who are the best men, because if there is a premium on political virtue, then everybody will pretend to be politically virtuous, and a successful pretense is as good as actuality. These are difficulties which Aristotle brings up in his way. Let us read a little bit later, line 11 there.

Reader:

But it is a matter of question what ought to be the sovereign power in the state.

LS: Sovereign power or right, literally translated; “what is to be the authoritative ingredient of the state” would be a bit closer.

Reader:

what is to be the authoritative thing in the state. Clearly it must be either the many,^{iv} or the rich, or the good, or the one man who is best of all, or a tyrant. But all of these arrangements appear to involve disagreeable consequences. For instance, if the poor take advantage of their greater numbers to divide up the property of the rich, is not this unjust? No, it may be said, for it was a resolution made by the supreme authority, the authoritative,^v in just form. (1281a12-18)

LS: And more literally, “and so it pleased justly the ruling power, by Zeus”; and a page or so later, there occurs another oath. Here the oath is obviously made by a democrat, the second oath is made by an anti-democrat. We have here the atmosphere of political discussion. You know when you get excited you swear, at least in olden times; and therefore an oath is wholly inappropriate in Euclid, but in a dialogue, a Platonic dialogue, they swear from time to time.

^{iv} Rackham has “multitude.”

^v The reader adds “the authoritative.”

And sometimes in order to confirm a purely theoretical assertion, one or the other fellows says, “By Zeus, it is so,” as if this could decide the issue. But here in Aristotle, that is extremely rare; and as far as I know, these are the only two cases in the general writings of Aristotle, and that has to do with the political atmosphere of this discussion. And it is so interesting that book 3, which is the most theoretical part of the *Politics*, is at the same time the most political part, and that has to do with the fact that Aristotle is so close to political life that even when he is most theoretical, what he regards as most important is the same as what the passionate political men regard as most important. And what kind of men should rule? This political question is the most important theoretical question.

Now some other points of last time’s assignment we still have to consider. In 1281a34 . . .

Reader:

Perhaps someone would say that in any case it is bad thing for a human being, having in his soul the passions that are the attributes of humanity, to be sovereign and not the law—

LS: In other words, someone says, as it were, to Aristotle: Your whole discussion is wrong because you are concerned only with whether these or these kinds of human beings should rule. But no rule of any human beings, rule of law, is this not the best answer? And now we give their answer.

Reader:

Suppose therefore that law is sovereign, but law of an oligarchic or democratic nature, what difference will it make as regards the difficulties that have been raised? (1281a34-39)

LS: So in other words, recourse to rule of law evades the issue because every law is the work of human legislators, and they are either monarchic or democratic or oligarchic or what have you. And therefore you come back to the same ultimate issue, the kinds of human beings.

Student: But isn’t the issue as raised here² that humans are subject to passions? And therefore arbitrary actions—and laws, even if they do tend toward oligarchy or democracy or what have you, they are not subject to being arbitrary as humans are.

LS: Very well, but this would only mean—let’s say an oligarchy operating under law or a democracy operating under law is preferable to a lawless oligarchy or a lawless democracy. But you do not solve the overall question by this recourse, just as, for example, if the Nazis had kept to their own Nazi laws, the regime would have been better than it actually was because they disregarded even their own laws, of course in the direction of greater villainy. Law is under all conditions a restraint if it is kept, if it is preserved, but there is a difference between the right kind and the wrong kind of restraint. Good. Now these were the only passages I thought it was necessary for us to consider from last time. There are a few more points regarding the rule of law, 1282b6.

Reader:

We have not however yet ascertained at all what particular character a code of laws correctly

laid down ought to possess, but the difficulty raised at the start still remains; for necessarily the laws are good or bad, just or unjust, simultaneously with and similarly to the regimes of states (though of course it is obvious that the laws are bound to be adapted to the regime); yet if so, it is clear that the laws in conformity with the correct regimes must necessarily be just, and those in conformity with the divergent forms of regimes unjust. (1281b6-13)

LS: That is in a way Aristotle's last word about the question of laws: all laws are necessarily relevant to or dependent upon the regime. Therefore one cannot separate the question of good laws from the question of good regimes. The general rule which can be stated is that laws in accordance with the right kinds of regimes are good, just; and laws in accordance with the wrong kinds of regimes are unjust. And therefore we have to find out what these right kinds of regimes are. Surely the rule of laws is not an answer to the question of the political order. Now is this point clear? It was in a way rediscovered in the nineteenth century, and partly by Marx and [. . .] that you cannot leave it at the law or the legal order but you have to go back behind it to the actual distribution of power. Only Marx believed he can identify this ultimate thing, the ultimate things with economic classes, and that is the question. What is [. . .] in the political sphere is surely that there are such things as the kind of men Aristotle mentioned, especially the^{vi} —that they are in all societies, and where the relative value of this [. . .] may change, say, from classical antiquity or the Middle Ages up to our time, but the difference is there is no society in which the difference does not exist. Needless to say, China and Soviet Russia have not abolished the distinction, as you can see from the style of life of the rich and the poor in these countries.

Aristotle makes a new beginning in 1282b14.

Reader:

And inasmuch as in all the sciences and arts the End is a good, and the greatest good and good in the highest degree in the most authoritative of all, which is the political faculty, and the good in the political field, that is, the general advantage, is justice, it is therefore thought by all men that justice is some sort of equality, and up to a certain point at all events they agree with the philosophical discourse in which conclusions have been reached about questions of ethics; for justice is a quality of a thing in relation to persons, and they hold that for persons that are equal the thing must be equal. But equality in what characteristics does this mean, and inequality in what? This must be made clear, since this too raises a difficulty, and calls for political philosophy. (1282b14-23)

LS: This is, I think, the only time that Aristotle uses the expression “political philosophy,” *philosophia politikē*. But this does not mean here necessarily [. . .] philosophy, but may very well mean an inquiry, an inquiry of a higher kind into politics. One must not take this too strictly as a technical term.

In the sequel he develops the case for monarchy on this ground: there is a certain plausibility for the view that the best should rule, but if there is one man in society who is of outstanding good, should he not rule? In order to clarify that, he has first to speak of the various kinds of

^{vi} The tape was changed at this point..

superiorities and inferiorities which play a role, and to bring out which are the politically relevant ones. He does this in 1283a3.

Reader:

According to this way of talking^{vii} every good thing would be commensurable with every other. For if to be of some particular height gave more claim, then height in general would be in competition with wealth and free birth—

LS: In other words, the tallest man would be the ruler because of his tallness.

Reader:

therefore if A excels more in height more than B does in virtue, and speaking generally size gives more superiority than virtue, all things would be commensurable; for if such-and-such an amount of one thing is better than such-and-such an amount of another, it is clear that such-and-such an amount of the one is equal to that amount of the other. But since this is impossible, it is clear that in politics with good reason men do not claim a right to office on the ground of every kind of inequality—if one set of men are slow runners and another fast, this is no good ground for the one set having more and the other less political power, but the latter superiority receives its honor in athletic contests; but the claim to office must necessarily be based in superiority in those things which go to the making of the city. Hence it is reasonable for the well-born, free and wealthy to lay claim to honor; for there must be free men and tax-payers, since the city consisting entirely of poor men would not be a city, any more than one consisting of slaves. But then, granting there is need of these, it is clear that there is also need of justice and civic virtue, for these are also indispensable in the administration of the city; except that wealth and freedom are indispensable for a city's existence, whereas justice and civic virtue are indispensable for its good administration. (1283a3-23)

LS: And now Aristotle describes, a little bit later in 1283, the political contents. Now if they all were in a single city: 1283b, the beginning.

Reader:

Therefore, supposing all were in one city, I mean, that is, the good and the wealthy and noble and also an additional mass of citizens, will there be a dispute, or will there not, as to who ought to govern? It is true that under each of the regimes that have been mentioned the decision as to who ought to govern is undisputed (for the difference between them lies in their sovereign classes—one is distinguished by being governed by the rich men, one by being governed by the good men, and similarly each of the others); but nevertheless we are considering the question how we are to decide between these classes supposing they all exist in the city at the same period. (1283b1-9)

LS: In other words, the ordinary case of course in the city is that there are only two kinds of people who fight for supremacy: ordinarily the rich and the poor, the classes which can be found in every city. But Aristotle takes the larger view: not only those classes which are

^{vii} In original: “on this theory.”

mostly contesting for supremacy, but those which could reasonably contest. Now in any ordinary case, say, in the case of the rich and the poor in civil strife, murder, and what have you, if the desire for peace prevails, then the conflicting parties appeal to an arbiter who decides the struggle fairly. Aristotle acts as such an arbiter, but an arbiter not only between these particular groups contending here and now but of all groups possibly contending anywhere. So there is the arbiter par excellence.

Now he develops in the sequel the case for monarchy, and this was stated by Mr. [. . .]. Do you remember the main point? Under what condition monarchy is best?

Student: When one man's just share is not to be partially sovereign but entirely, and when it is also the common interest.

LS: Well, if he is so outstanding, if he surpasses all others in excellence so that the virtue of all others taken together is not comparable to his, then he is no longer a part of the city but [of] the whole, and to make him subject to their laws would be like making a god subject to human beings. In this connection, Aristotle speaks of the relative right of ostracism. How does this subject come in, and what does he state?

Same Student: He says that it is used by all forms of states, just and unjust.

LS: But how does it come up? We have here a case of a single outstanding man, and he should be the ruler because of his excellence. Where does the issue of ostracism come in?

Same Student: If he is not made the ruler, then the state won't be a just state.

LS: But how does it work out in practice? He will not be given his due, and that will be detrimental to the city. But nevertheless, he would however act as a disturbance, because at least the better people would always look to him and regard his views as more authoritative than what the assembly, the deliberative or legislative body, decided. And therefore from this point of view you cannot blame the people if they ostracize him in the old sense of the word, meaning they condemn him to, say, ten years or longer of perpetual exile—and not meant as a punishment, but only in order to bring about that minimum of equality and stability without which the city couldn't function. This is the context in which he³ gives the relative justification of the ostracism, but only at a later point. Fundamentally, he regards it as better to give—if there is such a man, to give him the full political power. Let us read that, in 1284b15.

Reader:

Therefore in relation to acknowledged superiorities the argument for ostracism has a certain element of political justice. True, it is better for the lawgivers so to constitute the city at the outset that it does not need this medicine; but the next best course to steer, if occasion arises, is to endeavor to correct the regime by some such method of rectification. But this was not what happened with the cities, for they were not looking at what was advantageous for their proper regime, but their acts of ostracism were done in a revolutionary spirit. In the divergent forms of regime therefore it is evident that ostracism

is advantageous and just under the special regime, though perhaps it is also evident that it is not just absolutely; but in the case of the best regime there is much doubt as to what ought to be done, not as regards superiority or the other things of value, such as strength and wealth and popularity, but in the case of a person becoming exceptionally distinguished for virtue. It certainly would not be said that such a man must be banished and got out of the way; yet nevertheless no doubt men would not think that they ought to rule over such a man, for that would be the same as if they claim to rule over Zeus, dividing up his spheres of government. It remains therefore, and this seems to be the natural course, for all to obey such a man gladly, so that men of this sort may be kings in the cities for all time. (1284b15-34)

LS: “For all time” meaning not for a limited period; it doesn’t mean that his race or his family should always rule. Now this is an extreme possibility and for some reasons particularly interesting for Aristotle, although he knows that this is of no great practical importance in his time.

Student: Is the man of outstanding virtue the same as the expert in the arts?

LS: Yes, but only on a much higher level.

Same Student: But what I am saying is that if the analogy of who should judge [a] creation, whether it be the artist or the user, then it would seem that his rationale that the people who would be ruled by the man of outstanding virtue would naturally judge it to be a good rule, because if they assume *ad infinitum* that they should follow what this man says because he is a good man, therefore that is what they should do to be good men. It seems like all of this is resting on slightly circular foundations.

LS: Yes, as you stated. But it could also be stated differently. Let us assume that the user is not simply the best judge—is not, in the last analysis, the best judge. Then where do we find the best judge?

Same Student: It would be relative.

LS: No. There could be an alternative [. . .] There could be an art of arts, an art which determines the rank of all other arts and which assigns to each its proper sphere. That could also be, and you could say that was what philosophy was originally meant to be, the art of arts. Therefore, it would be [. . .] to make a distinction like that suggested by Plato somewhere, between cosmetics, which produces sham beauty, and gymnastics, which is productive of genuine health and beauty.

Same Student: I’m not sure how that exactly answers this question. Doesn’t the problem still remain of the virtuous man being excluded from the city because he is too good?

LS: Aristotle [. . .] you can’t blame the people if they ostracize him because he acts as a disturbance, although he may be the most—he may live in the most retired manner. But it is not

simply just, unqualifiedly just: that would be that he would be the sole ruler. To make it a bit more complete, let us take the case of Socrates. Let us say that there are beings that come and [. . .] Socrates to rule over them and to settle such issue as should they go to Sicily to try to conquer Sicily, or other matters. And let us assume that such a thing has happened anywhere in the world. Would it not be the duty of this man of outstanding practical wisdom to comply with their wish? And would the people not be well-advised to listen to him?

Same Student: I don't think Socrates would have said that he was the best man, and would have declined the offer from them. There's a problem there again. All of this is dependent on a good man judging, a really good man judging what is good. And if you have as your ideal a really good man, it is very hard for someone to get up there. And even Socrates, I would assume, would say that he hadn't reached it yet, though he might be an imperfection of it.

LS: Did he not say, in effect, that he was the wisest of the Athenians because he was the only one who knew that he was ignorant of the most important things? So then he was the wisest, and would it not have been his duty if asked? And the only reason, when he puts to himself the question, Why did he not go into politics?, and he says: Because it would have meant speedy death for me. That is the only reason which he gives. Now let us assume there was no possibility of his being killed but, on the contrary, the Athenians coming and begging him to rule over them, or at least advise them. Would it not have been his duty to do so, and would it not have made sense? Surely you can say this is an impossible assumption: people don't come to people and ask them to rule. People must go around, canvass, go around and try to get their votes. Whereas Aristotle, in an earlier passage which we have not discussed here, which we should have discussed, when he speaks about running for office as something most disgraceful—so you remember the passage? Because a gentleman of course does not go out and ask for votes as if he were a beggar.

Student: [. . .] any light in what would happen in this case, the dialogue where Socrates is asked to determine which is the better of two weapon systems,^{viii} a very lively, practical political issue, and somehow the report and benefit he gives this does not go very far in deciding the issue [. . .] arguing about the general question of courage.

LS: All right. That is true.

Student: [. . .] the difficulty of philosopher-kings.

LS: This⁴ is an extreme possibility which on closer inspection proves to be an impossibility, but this makes it more urgent. It raises the question of why does Aristotle, the sensible man, devote so much space to this question, to this possibility, to this seeming possibility?

Student: Aristotle has spoken of the state's existence, first of all for life itself, and second, its highest reason for existence, for the good life. Now it seems that this high and virtuous man, the man of greatest practical wisdom, could cater to the highest of the state while not being able to cater to the less ethical.

^{viii} Plato, *Laches* 178a–190d.

LS: Surely not. Surely not; it would be a very austere regime. But then one would say: If the people have become convinced by great political disasters that their whole life has been wrong, they might in such a mood be willing to listen. You can rightly say: How long will that mood last? And I think that is a point with a reasonable objection.

Student: This is descending to explaining things by the times again. But at the approximate time of this writing, there was a talented youth on the scene who was very likely to have considerable political influence over the cities and [. . .] He conquered everything in sight—with fair resistance, as it turned out. Aristotle had known this young man, and he may hardly have thought that Alexander was going to fill the bill and prove to [. . .] Socrates. It raised the question of at least the seemingly virtuous [. . .]

LS: There is one point to be considered here. Alexander the Great has produced what they now call a certain image. This image did not exist for Aristotle at all—I mean, first because he didn't go in for images; and second, even if he did, the image was not yet formed. Alexander was the gifted son of a half-barbaric prince, himself half-barbaric; and Aristotle did not like his own *polis*, which doesn't mean that Aristotle doesn't think one should derive some practical advantage regarding zoology—you know, when they came to India and so on, [there were] all kinds of animals they had never seen before and it was very interesting to Aristotle. But the main point is this. It seems to me that the question of this single superior man, who is in a way suprapolitical, above the *polis*, represents the problem of philosophy within the *polis*. For Aristotle, after all, the highest end for man is the theoretical life, and the question is therefore: What is the relation of the whole political dimension to the man of theoretical wisdom? This question is as it were represented on the political plane by the question of the man of superior political virtue and political wisdom.

Student: On the other hand, I was struck by the fact that it is precisely this point where Aristotle uses the famous phrase [. . .] and flutes. That implication seems to be that, as it was for Socrates, that the most theoretical men, the best men, descend into the city, because he is primarily concerned in Socrates's case with [. . .] I mean more concerned with speeches than he is with intellect, abstract intellect, the most theoretical.

LS: But what does that mean? His primary concern is what people say in order to go beyond it, so ideally he is not concerned with what people say.

Same Student: But the root . . .

LS: This goes too far. That is a very general phrase which must not be as it were monopolized for certain passages in Plato's [. . .] Now let us continue where we were. This question of the single superior man induces Aristotle to bring up the question of kingship as a whole, ⁵[about] which he talks in the sequel; and then he speaks of course of all kinds of kingships, not only of the most interesting one, of a man who has power over everything and is not subject to any laws, but also to the kingship like that of Sparta. Now there are a few points of general interest here in 1285b33.

Reader:

There are therefore, we may say, virtually two kinds of kingship that have been examined, this one and the Spartan.

LS: By this one he means [. . .] the all-embracing kingship.

Reader:

For most of the others lie between these, since with them the king is sovereign over fewer things than under absolute monarchy, but over more than under the Spartan kingship.

Hence our inquiry is virtually about two questions, one whether it is expedient or inexpedient for cities to have a military commander holding office for life, and that either by descent or by class, and one whether it is expedient or inexpedient for one man to be sovereign over everything. Now the study of a military command of the kind mentioned has more the aspect of a legal than of a constitutional inquiry—

LS: Yes, I would say political.

Reader:

(for it is possible for this form of office to exist under all regimes), so let it be dismissed at this first stage. (1285b33-1286a5)

LS: Which throws light on the whole character of Aristotle's investigation. A political investigation is not a legal investigation. A legal investigation has to do with what is from a political point of view secondary. This may be secondary either because it is derivative from the political—say, a democratic law, which is derivative from the democratic regime and therefore derivative—or as it may be politically neutral. For instance, the institution mentioned here, lifelong generalship as they have in Sparta, is not a matter of the regime. It does not make Sparta a monarchy, but it is a republican institution which you could have in any kind of republic. That is at least what Aristotle suggests, oligarchic, aristocratic, or monarchic, and therefore it is a legal question, a technical question, not a political question. I thought this was very characteristic of Aristotle's whole approach to political things.

Now then in the sequel, still speaking of this overall question of the best man, he raises the question: Rule of the best man or of the best laws? He makes then a qualified case for the rule of law, but we have already seen before that this cannot be the last word because of the problematic character of the rule of laws. There is everywhere, ultimately, the rule of men. There is another passage which we should consider, a kind of historical survey, in 1286a38.

Reader:

And if this is not indeed easy to insure in the case of many men, yet if there were a majority of good men and good citizens, would an individual make a more incorruptible ruler or rather those who though the majority in number yet are all good? The majority, is it not obvious? But it will be said that they will split up into factions, whereas with a single—

LS: There is still the issue of monarchy and republic.

Reader:

whereas with a single ruler this cannot happen. But against this must perhaps be set the fact that they are as virtuous in soul as the single ruler. If then the rule of the majority when these are all good men is to be considered an aristocracy, and that of the one man kingship, aristocracy would be preferable for the cities to kingship, whether the royal office be conjoined with military force or without it, if it be possible to get a larger number of men than one who are of similar quality. And it was perhaps only owing to this that kingships existed in earlier times, because it was rare to find men who greatly excelled in virtue, especially as in those days they dwelt in small cities. Moreover they used to appoint their kings on the grounds of public service, and to perform this is a task for the good man. But as it began to come about that many men arose who were alike in respect of virtue, they would no longer submit to royalty, but sought for some form of commonwealth, and set up a republican regime. And as men becoming baser began to make money out of the community, it is reasonable to suppose that some such cause as this occasioned the rise of oligarchies; for they brought wealth into honor. And from oligarchies they first changed to tyrannies, and from tyrannies to democracy; for by constantly bringing the government into fewer hands owing to a base love of gain, they made the many^{ix} stronger, so that it set upon the oligarchs, and democracies came into existence. But now that the cities have come to be even greater than they were, perhaps it is not easy for yet another form of regime besides democracy to come into existence. (1286a38-b21)

LS: So that is a brief historical survey of the political history of the human race from the beginning until now—and until the end, as Aristotle saw it. Now let us consider this for one moment. A certain stage has been reached where the cities like Athens, Syracuse and other places have become so big that they cannot be ruled any longer except democratically. I mean, with momentary tyrannies and so on, but in the long run the stable rule is democracy. What then? What would follow from this? What is Aristotle's judgment on democracy?

Student: We have a lot of humans who are hard workers [. . .] It is better to have a democracy in this case than a regime that doesn't have a lot of virtuous people. Aristocracy may even then be the best regime if among the population you have a lot of hardworking yeomen, and this may be the highest possible regime that is possible . . .

LS: Yes, but Aristotle doesn't say that democracy is not as good as aristocracy [. . .] regime, an unjust regime. That is the difficulty. That would mean under certain conditions it is practically impossible to have a decent regime. Is this not an enormous assertion? We today do not find this, because we think value judgments are purely subjective and therefore the whole problem does not arise for us. But for anyone living prior to 1900, this would have been a terrible assertion. But what enables Aristotle to say so nevertheless, despite this difficulty which I pointed out? The whole question of the best regime as Aristotle means it allows a gradation of regimes, and therefore indeed there can be a shading of the very good, good, the least good, and then the least bad, and this becomes all in a way tolerable.

^{ix} Rackham has "multitude."

The doctrines which were developed in modern times and are characteristic of modernity have a very different character. They are not simply speaking concerned with the best regime, but with the legitimate regime; therefore there is no deviation possible. Think of a certain kind of democrat who would say no [. . .] with any nondemocratic regimes, be it communist or fascist, and regard all nondemocratic regimes as at best evils which must be tolerated for the time being, but because one and the same regime is just everywhere. These doctrines developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the great men we have mentioned, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, are the most important for [. . .] The kind of doctrines which they developed, founded, and named at that time, their kind of doctrine was called universal public law. Public law, of course, not private law. What you find in the social contract, or Locke's civil government, or in the [. . .] On the other hand, it is not ordinary public law, because it is not the public law of England, Spain, or any other country. It is the public law of reason, universal public law, and therefore it is of course a natural law doctrine. Hobbes's doctrine of sovereignty, Locke's doctrine of property, with its infinite implications, Rousseau's doctrine of the social contract, these are doctrines derived from natural law but presenting themselves as the natural law regarding civil society, regarding constitutions. As that, they are of course universally valid. What Hobbes presents in the [. . .] and the others in their famous works, the deviations are either simply barbaric—as Locke would probably say of society which doesn't have yet money, uncivilized, savage—or they are simply wrong, against the principle of this universal public law. There is no provision for gradations there: it is either the right order or no order, whereas Aristotle allows for great variety. One can therefore call these doctrines developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries doctrinaire. Aristotle is not in this respect⁶ doctrinaire.

This is a passage which we must not disregard under any circumstances, 1287b36. That is probably the last chapter.

Reader:

This then more or less is the case advanced by those who argue against kingship. But perhaps, although this is a true account of the matter in some cases, it does not apply in others. For there is such a thing as being naturally fitted to be controlled by a master, and in another case, to be governed by a king, and in another, to exercise citizenship, and a different government is just and expedient for different people; but there is no such thing as natural fitness for tyranny, nor for any other of the forms of government that are divergences, for these come about against nature. But merely from what has been said, it is clear that among people who are alike and equal it is neither expedient nor just for one to be sovereign over all—neither when there are no laws, but he himself is in the place of law, nor when there are laws, neither when both sovereigns and subjects are good nor when both are bad, nor yet when the sovereign is superior in virtue, except in a certain manner. What this manner is must be stated; and in a way it has been stated already even before. But first we must define what constitutes fitness for royal government, what fitness for aristocracy, and what fitness for a republic. A fit subject for royal government is a populace of such a sort as to be naturally capable of producing a family of outstanding excellence for political leadership; a community fit for aristocracy is one that naturally produces a populace capable of being governed under the form of government fit for free

men by those who are fitted by virtue for taking the part of leaders in constitutional government; a republican community, one in which there naturally grows up a military populace capable of being governed and of governing under a law that distributes the offices among the well-to-do in accordance with merit. When therefore it comes about that there is either a whole family or even some one individual that differs from the other citizens in virtue so greatly that his virtue exceeds that of all the others, then it is just for this family to be the royal family or this individual king, and sovereign over all matters. (1287b36-1288a18)

LS: The crucial importance of this passage is this. We have heard at the beginning of the book, and it was repeated in book 3, that the city is natural; and then we learned in book 3 that there is no city without a regime, and the regime is the most important thing in any city because it gives the city its character. The city cannot be natural if the regimes are not natural. There are great difficulties there. We have discussed some of them in some passages where it appeared that convention plays such a great role—you remember when he quoted Gorgias, with the line drawn between citizen and noncitizen is drawn rather arbitrarily. This cannot be a natural distinction. So would this not apply fundamentally to all regimes, and would therefore not all cities ultimately be conventional although it is natural for men to live in cities?

Now here we are given an answer—whether the answer is satisfactory is ⁷[another] matter: Yes, the regimes are natural; the good regimes are natural, but which of them is natural depends on the situation of the populace concerned. If it is a populace by nature fit to produce a single man and a single family of outstanding men, then it is a monarchy; and in the two other cases, it is an aristocracy or a polity. The three other regimes, among them democracy, are of course against nature according to Aristotle's doctrine. But what should happen if in the circumstance no regime other than a democracy is possible, as he almost said in the passage we read shortly before? That is a long question. This being the case, the whole question of the natural character of the *polis* must be regarded as an open question. That man's natural sociality cannot be denied, but Aristotle of course does not speak merely of man's natural sociality, but he speaks of man's being naturally a political animal, i.e., an animal or a living being meant for life in a *polis* and [who] will find his full development only in a relatively small society compared with our modern political society. Whether this is all prejudice of Aristotle's time or whether it has some greater importance we must discuss later after we have seen more.

I mention only one point: the question whether there is not an optimum size for living together has become a practical question again in connection with urban politics, and some of the students of urban politics now have regarded it as wise to refer to Aristotle himself because he has [. . .] reputation, but because he stated this problem with unusual clarity.

Session 9: November 6, 1967
Book 4, chapters 1–7

Leo Strauss: You stated almost clearly the thread of the argument in this section.ⁱ Starting from a popular notion according to which there are only two regimes to speak of, oligarchy and democracy, Aristotle shows that it is wrong, superficial; and yet he finally makes clear that the superficial view is not altogether¹ [unwarranted] for the reason indicated: because of these various parts of the *polis*, only two combinations are impossible. A man can be poor and a soldier and a magistrate and what have you, but he cannot be poor and rich at the same time, and vice versa. Therefore the oligarchy–democracy distinction is basic.

I think I should use this occasion to make this whole argument somewhat clearer in the fourth book altogether. You remember the schema in book 3: kingship, aristocracy, polity, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy—in this way, from the best to the worst. It is almost the same as that of Plato in the *Statesman*. This has the advantage of obvious completeness, because there are two considerations, number and goodness-badness, but it is also somewhat misleading because one doesn't see from this example that democracy is the rule of the poor and oligarchy of the rich.

We can therefore also start in another way: from the crude view, such as today one would say [that] the two most interesting and common regimes are democracy and communism; in Aristotle's time, [they were] democracy and oligarchy. This is the starting point, and that means the rule of the poor. There are various gradations of that, but a preponderance of the poor would surely be necessary, and a preponderance of the rich in the oligarchy. Now both are unsatisfactory, because the rule of the poor means the rule of those who cannot possibly have the necessary education. That was Aristotle's point, and the rule of the rich also, because wealth is a dubious² [title] to rule. It has some claims to respect, but not altogether unquestionable [ones]. Therefore we see a blend of the two, a mixture. Mixture can be just a mish-mash, but it can also be a true and judicious mixture. If it is a true or judicious mixture, the mixture is better than the extremes and has its locus not here, but here. [LS writes on the blackboard] This is the regime which Aristotle calls polity. This is not yet quite clear from today's assignment, what the polity means, but the polity is a regime in which all men who are able to supply themselves with heavy armor [. . .] and of course the knights, in addition, are full citizens. So that means not very high, but not negligent in the property qualifications.

But that means also something else. Since the title for full citizenship is based on a man's military service as light infantry, there is an ingredient of virtue implied in the claim to citizenship. It is not full virtue but some virtue, military virtue; therefore it is higher than these morally neutral claims on being a free-born citizen or [. . .] Still, we can imagine blends which demand more than this kind of military citizen virtue. Then we arrive at a higher thing, and that is called aristocracy. Here there is a certain ambiguity pointed out by Aristotle. We have to make a distinction between vulgar aristocracy, in which the notion of virtue is not a very strict one but a rather crude notion of gentility or decency or honesty. Virtue in the strict sense would be the aristocracy here, which would be undistinguishable from what Aristotle

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

describes or underlines as virtue in the *Ethics*. Is this clear?

So there are two starting points altogether in the argument of the *Politics*. Both supplement each other, and this is thought as a more politically possible one because it begins from what is politically most obvious, the conflict between democracy and oligarchy. There is one little point. Why is Aristotle dissatisfied with the view that democracy is the rule of the majority?

Student: I found him a little contradictory. At one point he uses an example of thirteen hundred people in a community, and one thousand of them were rich, and they ruled pretty unfairly . . .

LS: That is not the point. Aristotle says rule of the majority is not good, because in any republic or regime the majority of those in the regime rules. If you have an oligarchy where fifty men are entitled to be rulers, then of course in the assembly twenty-six is the majority. It is not terribly important, but one must bring it up.

I was least satisfied with your use of the words actual and ideal; but of course that is not your fault, that is the fault of Barker. Aristotle never speaks of ideal, but he says the best regime. Since the word “best” is much easier to understand in English, and I think correspondingly in other languages, ³[than] this artificial word “ideal,” why one must make the sensation I don’t understand. I think it is just the kind of silly convention, that a direct and easily intelligible word is not fine enough or proper enough for academic discussions.

(Strauss now discusses two papers from last time.)ⁱⁱ

Here is one point: “Is the *Ethics* sufficient to cope with the fundamental political problem, i.e., is the *Ethics* to the *Politics* only the *Ethics* applied, or does politics have a kind of autonomy which compels us to desert ethical considerations?” That is a necessary question, but we must also raise the opposite question. Is the ethical teaching embodied in the *Politics* identical with the teaching of the *Ethics*? That means to go over the *Politics* with a fine comb, and put together everything said there about virtue and also about individual virtues, and compare that with the *Ethics*. I remind you only of the passage 1283a20, where Aristotle speaks of political virtue, and political virtue always means in Plato and Aristotle something lower than moral virtue proper: “Even if the *polis* has some worst motives for ostracizing great men, the action will still be justified, for each regime will naturally and justly try to preserve itself.” But Aristotle does not simply say “justly.” He says there is some political justice in that.

Here is something about the difference between the modern conception and the classical conception: “According to the modern conception, there may be wisdom or reason in the whole, without there being wisdom or reason in a single part.” That is correct. This way of looking at political society is generally known as the understanding of the state as a machine, because in the machine no part is reasonable and yet it is a product of reason.

Then there is a very interesting discussion of Aristotle’s view that the great man, the

ⁱⁱ As noted by the transcriber.

outstanding man, is a whole and not a part; therefore he cannot be used as a part and subject to the whole. You illustrate this by a certain view of Greek tragedy. This is reasonable.

You give some reasons why it seems impossible to say without qualification that Aristotle occupies a citizen's perspective on political things. That is true but, as you say, without qualification. To some extent it is correct. I can explain this very briefly as follows. If one takes the *Ethics*, which is the first part of this work of which the *Politics* is the second part, and we have here the perspective of the gentleman, who is the highest kind of citizen: here there is the noble, the noble life, virtue, whatever you call it. That's the end beyond which he doesn't look. This is very sensible. That is, a man who must have reasons why he should be decent has by this very reason ceased to be decent. So that is not a question of why one should be decent; that is not a question for the moral man as moral man. Aristotle understands the perfect gentlemen accordingly. But Aristotle stands here and looks at this perspective, but at the same time he also stands here and looks at it from the outside, and that is not the gentleman's view. In other words, he looks at that happiness which all men desire and which is not without further ado identical with moral virtue.

Student: It's hard to see just what there is for the nonphilosophic gentleman to do in the city, what for him is the difference between mere life and the good life. He can't even go to tragedy, really, since having understood Aristotle, he understands that piety is nonsense.

LS: Oh, never . . . you burn so many bridges.

Same Student: It is hard to understand what the nonphilosophic gentlemen are supposed to do in the city. In what way does their virtue transcend the city?

LS: How often have you read the *Politics*? Have you completely forgotten books 7 and 8, about the education of the future gentlemen?

Same Student: My point is that the gentlemen can know about the utility of piety . . .

LS: Tragedy is not presented by Aristotle as an institution of piety.

Same Student: No, but I wondered what point there could be in going to see a tragedy.

LS: Isn't this shocking, what you're saying? How many people go to the theater without any particular religious intention? So what is good for people today, why should this not be good for Aristotle? In addition, is there not the enormous field of political activity of the highest order? Look at a man like Pericles or Winston Churchill. Isn't this something highly resplendent which may fill man's life, and keeping the memory of such noble deeds? Is there not always a danger of war? I grant you, immediately at the end of a very big war there is no danger of another big war right away, but apart from that, is there not always? Then you are much too rash, and since this is an excusable infirmity in young people, let us disregard it.

I don't know whether we will cover the whole ground today, but it is absolutely indispensable

that we return again to the beginnings; otherwise, we will not know what we are doing. We will be unable to understand Aristotle's *Politics* or any other work of this kind if we do not take it seriously, and that means if we do not regard it as addressed to us and not to other people dead millennia ago and we only for some shallow interest of curiosity read it. Aristotle claims to teach the political truth for all times, therefore for us in particular. His subject at first glance, and also at the second glance, is the *polis*, and present-day societies are not *poleis*; therefore, what Aristotle teaches is inapplicable. That you will hear from many people today. There is something very important to that. Let us reflect on it for a moment. What is the character of present-day societies? The term which is frequently used is industrialized societies, and that is something different from having undergone the Industrial Revolution, because these were not yet industrial societies. The key point seems to be that today there is no longer a need for a large farming population. As a matter of fact, that can almost disappear, and the tremendous problem of leisure time coming up together with it.

But coming somewhat closer to the political question, in this society it is assumed there is no longer a fundamental political problem. People mean that by saying "the end of ideology," an expression you must have heard, which means that the conflict of regimes has ceased to exist or to be important. A generation ago there were the three isms. No one of you is old enough to remember that: fascism, communism, and liberal democracy. Now fascism was finished, as you all know. Liberal democracy and communism survived, but they are bound to converge through welfarism of liberal democracy [on the one hand], and the inevitable liberalization of communism on the other. The demand for consumer goods, including jazz and other things, as you know, is bound to make even Mao's China and Albania relatively liberal. In brief, we have here two factors which come to the fore, which are more visible in the West for the time being but which are raising their heads in the East: wealth, enormous wealth due to economics and technology; plus psychiatry for the problems which cannot be served by wealth but by the means of wealth, because the psychiatrists are not inexpensive people. And behind that is the notion—I can only give you some slogans to point to you the facts of which you are aware. Man is not by nature aggressive, or, to state it in the old words, a formulation of Rousseau, man is by nature good; only if he is more or less mistreated by bad social conditions,⁴ including lack of affection on the part of his parents, that makes him aggressive. You know this kind of thing. In other words, there is no political problem. The problem is economical, social, psychological, psychiatric.

Now let us grant all this, and then of course Aristotle's *Politics* is absolutely obsolete, there is no doubt about that. But one point would still remain. We would still have to understand this world without ideology, this world characterized by affluence and psychology. This world, this society, differs radically from all earlier societies including our own society, because the other is something which we expect will come within the next ten years, perhaps, but is not yet here. Now when we try to understand this happy new world and what its foundations are, we see very soon that this became possible through a reinterpretation of something powerfully pressing Aristotle, namely, of science. In the seventeenth century science was reinterpreted as being for the sake of power, for the sake of human power or for the relief of man's estate, long before these gadgets have been invented which make our life so comfortable. Some men like Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, and others conceived of science in this novel function, and then it

became some centuries afterward an actuality.

In Aristotle as well as in the other ancient philosophies, the society, the *polis*, is impervious to science. Science is a pursuit of a very small group of individuals which radically transcends the *polis*, and which may have a kind of accidental use for the *polis*, but this is not its primary and essential function. It is an end pursued by the scientist or philosopher as such, and the end[s] pursued by the nonscientists, i.e., the large majority of any civil society, are radically different. This view was then changed, and so that the end of science—the relief of man’s estate, the better end of human conditions—the conditions became identical with the end supposedly to be pursued by the civil society itself, and there was therefore harmony. Connected with this great change was another one which is very important but which I can mention now only in passing. The *polis* is a very small society, as will be made clear by Aristotle later on, and was already clear by some allusions we have seen.

Now these new societies in which we live, or in which these men who make the prediction hope to live, are of course republican societies, not monarchies. They claim to be democratic, but let us say republican. Now what about republics? We find republics in classical antiquity, but since Alexander the Great the republics have lost their independence and their being. The same happened in Rome shortly afterward, and then we have some things of cities, but not comparable to what we find in classical antiquity, in Germany and Italy in the Middle Ages, especially Venice and Florence. There were also city-states like Athens, Sparta, or Rome, but that means you never had large-scale republics. There was a Roman Empire, but the Roman Empire proved to be absolutely ungovernable. On a republican basis it was to be transformed into a monarchy, to say nothing of the fact that Rome was of course governed by the citizens of Rome physically present in Rome. There was nothing comparable to a modern republic.

A large-scale republic was regarded as impossible, and the first influential discussion trying to establish the alternative was the *Federalist Papers*, partly prepared by Montesquieu’s *Spirit of Laws*, but the most important point in history, possible book, is the *Federalist Papers*. The *Federalist Papers* spoke of course of a large-scale republic as a desirable possibility, and it took two generations at least, meaning up to the Civil War included, until it was proven that such a society is workable. You remember more literally than I do the famous saying of Lincoln, “government of the people, by the people,” and by which he meant of course a large-scale republic. This was still a question, and since that time, since the American Civil War, the possibility of a large-scale republic was⁵ [evident] a very short time ago. In Europe the fate of the French Republic is a good example of the difficulties encountered there. But this is only in passing.

There is another point more important for authors. I have said up to now that there is a certain view according to which a book like Aristotle’s *Politics* is utterly obsolete, because we enter now a way of life in which politics has lost completely the importance which it had for Aristotle because there is no longer a serious alternative of regimes, and all solutions can be made, as they say, pragmatically, without getting excited and in a businesslike manner. Even if this is so, it is necessary to understand this new kind of society, and that is not possible except in contrast with the alternative regime, as you will see. Now the second

consideration is of course that there is no certainty whatever as to this convergence of liberal democracy and communism being the way of the future. Even granting that this would be the most reasonable solution, where is it written that men always act reasonably? There is quite some evidence to the contrary; and surely for the time being, [there is] still the difference, and that means [that] a potential conflict, to put it mildly, between liberal democracy and communism is still the characteristic political phenomenon, the fundamental political phenomenon, i.e., the conflict of regime. And therefore the notion of regime is the tool of analysis, if one wants to use this term. Therefore, however immediately inapplicable the immediate recipes of Aristotle may be, the approach [and] the kind of question which he raises are fundamentally the same which we today must raise.

Student: Toward the beginning of the course, you mentioned at one point that Aristotle recognized the need to put science in a certain sense to the service of the *polis*, in that every *polis* required certain measures for its own defense. To what extent does this admission on Aristotle's part constitute a qualification of what you stated to be his conception of the relationship between science and society, radically different ends?

LS: You mean military inventions . . . these inventions did not mean the proposition that from now on science should devote itself radically to such purposes. It meant only that what was done, how—long after Aristotle, when Syracuse was conquered, two centuries after Aristotle, when Archimedes helped the city. He regarded this as a very dirty business, not in the way in which a modern liberal physicist would regard it or a chemist would regard it in chemical or biological warfare, but rather the mechanic's job, not the job of a theoretically interested man.

Same Student: This fact of military self-defense seems to suggest there is something inherent about the existence of a *polis* confronted with other polises . . .

LS: Poli . . . ⁱⁱⁱ

Same Student: . . . which makes for some kind of union between the demands of society and those of science.

LS: That is much more complicated, and we cannot throw this up today, as we should. Let me say only this. We have to take part of your question, and that is this. What are the limitations, the essential limitations, of Aristotle's teachings, not merely with a view to today, we know that, but even given what was known in his time? There is one strong point of which you reminded us, and another connected is this. Now let us assume this line of argument. We must admit military⁶ [inventions]; and at this moment we let in evil, because there will be other inventions, and even military inventions will lead to political changes. Then we get an infinite technological development where men's products and tools become his master. What can Aristotle do about that? What remedy does he have? He had this remedy, namely, that there would be periodical cataclysms, natural catastrophes, where human life would almost completely disappear, chiefly in the form of deluges. Very small

ⁱⁱⁱ Strauss probably corrects the student's plural form of *polis*.

groups of men would survive on high mountains, so that the *polis* could start again. In both cases, Aristotle assumes something which we may call the goodness of nature. Nature will prevent that man will become so big, so powerful that he becomes a slave of his own works.

We can no longer have this trust in the goodness of nature. That argument was already made in classical antiquity, that if a catastrophe can destroy, say, ninety-nine percent of the human race, there is no reason why a given catastrophe might not destroy one hundred percent, and then there would be the end. There would be no possible restoration of human lives. So in Aristotle's view, as he stated it, it is not tenable, but this does not mean that the questions which he regards as the primary questions to be addressed to political facts and the approach which he has is not fundamentally sound. That no one can sensibly say.

Now let us turn to today's assignment. We can read only a very few passages. Let us begin at the beginning of book 4, where Aristotle states in a clear way what is the subject of political science, and Aristotle compares here political science or art with something like gymnastics.

Reader: 1288b10.

In all the arts and the sciences that are not merely sectional but that in relation to some one class or subject are complete, it is the function of a single art or science to study what is suited to each class, for instance what sort of gymnastic exercise is beneficial for what sort of bodily frame, and what is the best sort (for the best must naturally suit the person of the finest natural endowment and equipment), and also what one exercise taken by all is the best for the largest number (for this is also a question for gymnastic science), and in addition, in case someone desires a habit of body and a knowledge of athletic exercises that are not the ones adapted to him, it is clearly the task of the trainer and gymnastic master to produce this capacity also just as much. (1288b10-18)

LS: This is the analogy, teaching us what Aristotle presents as political science. Political science in the first place must be concerned with the best regime—not regime in the sense of diet for the exercise of the body, but the regime of the *polis*—and then what is best for most *poleis*, most cities. And also, as he makes clear, if you have a given *polis* with its regime and its laws, and it may have a better one if only they would think of it as that. These are the full tasks of political science. Aristotle puts a stronger emphasis on the lesser, lower tasks of political science, namely, what is good for most cities, or what to do in a given city as distinguished from the best regime. Otherwise, the inspiration is quite Platonic. A little later, in 1289a13 there is another statement about regimes and laws which we shall read.

Reader:

And after this it needs the same discrimination also to discern the laws that are the best, and these that are suited to each of the forms of regimes. For the laws should be laid down, and all people lay them down, to suit the regimes—the regimes must not be made to suit the laws; for a regime is the regulation of the offices of the state in regard to the mode of their distribution and to the question what is the sovereign power in the state and what is the object of each community. (1289a13-18)

LS: Yes, what is the end toward which it strives. The *politeia*—in other words, the regime—determines two things: what the overall objective of political life should be, say, freedom or wealth or whatever it may be; and for the same reason it determines what kind of men should hold the power: those akin to the end. Otherwise, there would be a radical disharmony. Aristotle refers in the sequel to the six regimes he had mentioned in book 3, and he claims to have spoken of kingship and aristocracy, the two best, and must now turn to the four others.

Reader: 1289b17 to19.

which of the other forms too is desirable for what people (since probably for some democracy is necessary more than oligarchy).

LS: So in other words, democracy—according to the severe doctrine of book 3 an [. . .]^{iv} regime—may be necessary;^v and that leads then to the very interesting question: Is there not a kind of tension between the *Politics*, which must be concerned with what is expedient, and the teaching of the *Ethics*? Then he puts this question on a broader basis and raises the question of why there is a number of regimes, and the answer is because there is a variety of parts of the *polis* and this gives rise to the possibility of a variety of regimes. In 1290b21, we find a fundamental reasoning. This we should read.

Reader:

It has been stated that there are several forms of regime, and what is the cause of this; but let us take the starting-point that was laid down before, and say that there are more forms than those mentioned, and what these forms are, and why they vary. For we agree that every city possesses not one part but several. Therefore just as, in case we intended to obtain classification of animals, we should first define the properties necessarily belonging to every animal (for instance some of the sense-organs, and the machinery for masticating and for receiving food through the mouth and the stomach,^{vi} and in addition to these the locomotive organs of the various species), and if there were only so many necessary parts, but there were different varieties of these (I mean for instance certain various kinds of mouth and stomach and sensory organs, and also of the locomotive parts as well), the number of possible combinations of these variations will necessarily produce a variety of kinds of animals (for it is not possible for the same animal to have several different sorts of mouth, nor similarly of ears either), so that when all the possible combinations of these are taken they will all produce animal species, and there will be as many species of the animal as there are combinations of the necessary parts: —so in the same way also we shall classify the varieties of the regimes that have been mentioned. For cities also are composed not of one, but of several parts, as has been said often. (1290b21-40)

LS: We may therefore say that Aristotle's doctrine of regimes is based on a kind of political anatomy, just as there is a zoological anatomy which is a fundamental part of zoology, giving us a complete survey of the possible species. Therefore that would be a true system. We can do the same thing in politics, knowing these parts; and he acts on it in the sequel and therefore he finds

^{iv} Strauss presumably says something to the effect of “inferior” or “unnatural.”

^v Cf. *Politics* 1287b39–41.

^{vi} Rackham has “such as a mouth and a stomach.”

out that the two incompatible things in the same individuals are wealth and poverty, and therefore oligarchy and democracy.

Student: But surely the primary intent of Aristotle's biological [. . .] and it would seem also we could extend the analogy to political teaching—is not the various combinations of parts but the whole, and this kind of argument is a very rare one. This, if you consider Aristotle's biology, is not really what he thinks about why species that are exist.

LS: But is this not behind it, the principle which not every species which is possible, according to the general schema must be [. . .]

Same Student: The reason for that has nothing to do with combinations of parts. It has to do with the whole, which in this case is a particular animal.

LS: There may be compatibilities, and there might be a time when it might be perfectly possible according to the schema. It doesn't exist in half. The question at first glance would be possible; then a deeper investigation might show that people overlooked a finer point that it is not in fact possible, although according to the general order it seemed to be.

Same Student: The key to that would seem not to lie in the parts, but in the whole.

LS: But which whole . . . you mean the whole combination. I think the difference would be between a more superficial and a more profound investigation of the whole. "Compatibilities" means precisely what is compatible so as to form a whole.

Immediately following, Aristotle states what the parts of the *polis* are, and he enumerates explicitly eight, as you see if you turn to 1291a34; but immediately afterwards he speaks without mentioning the number nine of nine, so there would be nine such parts. I would advise you to keep in mind this section on the parts of the *polis*, because there will be other enumerations later on and it is useful to compare them. Now a passage which we have to consider is 1291a9, when he brings up the fifth part.

Reader:

The fifth class is the one to defend the city in war, which is no less indispensable than the others if the people are not to become the slaves of those who come against them; for surely it is quite out of the question that it should be proper to give the name of city to a community that is by nature a slave. (1291a6-9)

LS: That is very interesting. The expression "by nature a slave" we have found in book 1 as the crucial part of the discussion of slavery, and there the natural slave was a man who was because of his stupidity or complete lack of self-control unable to take care of himself and needed a master. Here we have the modern notion of slavery: what is by nature slavish. A *polis* which is unable to defend itself because it does not have an army is by nature slavish, not because they are not intelligent but because it is impossible for such a *polis* to survive. Now this has consequences for the question of slavery. A community of men who are unwilling to stand up for their

independence or their freedom cannot complain if they are unstable, and here we will find a bridge from the useless natural slaves [. . .] to the useful conventional slaves, which Aristotle makes use of even in his best regime. They would be servants not because they could not take care of themselves because of morals, but because of lack of stamina.

Now toward the end of this passage in 1291b, he speaks of the only two uncombinable parts, which are the rich and the poor.

Reader:

Now as for the other faculties^{vii} many people think that it is possible for them to be possessed in combination, for example, for the same men to be the soldiers that defend the city in war, and the farmers that till the land and the artisans, and also the Councilors—

LS: In a democracy . . .

Reader:

and indeed all men claim to possess virtue and think themselves capable of filling most of the offices of state; but it is not possible for the same man to be poor and rich.

LS: Men will resist everybody, however dumb. The same man cannot be rich and poor.

Reader:

Hence these seem to be in the fullest sense the parts of the state, the rich and the poor.

LS: In other words, on the basis of the most common opinion, it has great force because it is universally admitted.

Reader:

And also the fact that the rich are usually few and the poor are many makes these two among the parts of the state appear as opposite sections; so that the superior claims of these classes are even made the guiding principles upon which regimes are constructed, and it is thought that there are two forms of regime, democracy and oligarchy. (1291b3-12)

LS: So Aristotle in a way vindicates the popular wrong opinion as intelligible, given these premises generally made. Then he turns to the question of the kinds of democracy and oligarchy, to which he devotes the sequel. Now let us read the passage regarding democracy, 1291b39.

Reader:

This therefore is one kind of democracy, where the offices are held on property qualifications, but these low ones, although it is essential that the man who acquires the specified amount should have the right to hold office, and the man who loses it should not hold office. And another kind of democracy is for all the citizens that are not open to challenge, on score of birth—^{viii}

^{vii} Rackham has “as to the other capacities.”

^{viii} As a footnote to the phrase “open to challenge,” Rackham adds “i.e. on the score of birth.”

LS: Not only on score of birth, but criminals who have not paid their taxes or have not properly taken care at the graves of their parents, certainly in Athens.

Reader:

unimpeachable^{ix} to have a share in office, but for the law to rule; and another kind of democracy is for all to share in the offices on the mere qualification of being a citizen, but for the law to rule. Another kind of democracy is where all the other regulations are the same, but the multitude is sovereign and not the law; and this comes about when the decrees of the assembly override the law. This state of things is brought about by the demagogues; for in the cities under democratic government guided by law a demagogue does not arise, but the best classes of citizens are in the most prominent position; but where the laws are not sovereign, then demagogues arise; for the common people become a single composite monarch, since the many are sovereign not as individuals but collectively. (1291b39-1292a12)

LS: In other words, not even laws, but rule by decree. That is the worst and extreme kind of democracy. Similarly, he speaks in the sequel about four kinds of oligarchy, and in 1292b22 there is a more detailed description of the four kinds of democracy.

Reader:

When therefore the farmer class and the class possessed of moderate property is sovereign over the government—

LS: That is to say, when you have a property qualification, and preferably a landed property qualification, then you get a good kind of democracy. Why? Why do these men rule according to laws?

Reader:

for they have a livelihood if they work, but are not able to be at leisure, so that they put the law in control and hold the minimum of assemblies necessary; and the other persons have the right to take part when they have acquired the property assessment fixed by the laws.

LS: Now we can figure out one other point. If this is so, if this is a farming democracy and they have to do their hard work and cannot have many assemblies, who is doing the daily political work? Who will be the magistrate? The rich people, but they are elected by the *dēmos*, and they have to give an account of their doings to the *dēmos*, but the political ruling itself is exercised by the gentlemen. That is one possibility. Therefore the worst thing you can do from this point of view is to enable the poor to partake of the legislative and judicial life by paying them for that service—and that was the thing which in Athens was introduced and of course shocked all the gentlemen, but made possible that a poor man could be a judge. This will develop at greater length later on.

Let us read the passage in 1294b6. This makes somewhat clearer the Aristotelian notion of a mixed regime, this notion which you still find in the *Federalist Papers*: mixed government,

^{ix} The reader changes the phrase “open to challenge” to “unimpeachable.”

which has played such a great role throughout the ages.

Reader:

In the third place is a combination of the two systems, taking some features from the oligarchical law and some from the democratic; I mean, for example, that it is thought to be democratic for the offices to be assigned by lot, for them to be elected oligarchic, and democratic for them not to have a property qualification, and oligarchic to have one; therefore it is aristocratic and political^x—

LS: “Political,” meaning proper for a polity, for this kind of rule.

Reader:

to take one feature from one form and the other from the other, from oligarchy that offices are to be elected, and from democracy that this is not to be on a property qualification. (1294b6-13)

LS: Here is a point which Aristotle will also explain later on. The democratic principle of voting men into offices is by lot. This is the thought⁷ which we are no longer so familiar with, and we take it for granted that individuals are running for office and voted into office. This is from the strict classical point of view not democratic because if they are men, you judge them according to merit, and this is an aristocratic sense. The democratic principle which gives everyone the same possibility to come into any ruling office is by lot: no human interference. What does it mean that every born American can become President of the United States? We know quite well that there is no one here, even a born citizen, who has a chance. But if that is a matter of lot, anyone might [. . .] The other kind of voting was called electing and choosing by raising the hand, voting for someone. This is not as democratic, and the combination is clear that democratic [requires] no property qualification, and oligarchic, a property qualification.

Student: It seems like the best type of democracy is really an oligarchy.

LS: What do you mean by that? The rule of the rich?

Same Student: The rule by the rich farmers, who have a leisure class. In a sense, you get the same drawbacks. The people who favored democracy wanted democracy so that the rich wouldn’t rule. In this case, the best type of democracy is an oligarchic democracy.

LS: Yes, just as you can say the best oligarchy is the most democratic oligarchy. Aristotle denies that they are mixed. A mixture is a conscious blend, but even the best democracy and the best oligarchy as presented here claim to be in strict accordance with the democratic principle. We must shake on that. The thing that one could say is that a nice gentleman farmer must actually rule and lead the armies. The mass of the population is farming, the poor farmer. The trouble is that these wealthy people become, sooner or later, the creditors and the poor become the debtors. This raises a great conflict, and some of the creditors may be perfectly correct men but want to have their interest paid regularly, and this works hardships. Then there are risings of debtors, sometimes leading into killings of creditors, and so there must be something more to

^x Rackham has “constitutional.”

protect the debtors. You had it in this country at the beginning and later on.^{xi} So this is not so simple.

The only solution would be that this ruling class consist of true gentlemen, i.e., men [who], when financial demands are concerned, would rather relax than insist. As Aristotle says in the *Ethics*, a just man is a man who demands less than is his due. In other words, if you have a ruling class consisting of truly virtuous men, then it would be a different proposition, and that is exactly the Aristotelian solution when he comes to it in books 7 and 8. Even there, there is a difficulty because these poor free-born men⁸ still claim some participation in legislation, because after all there must be a way they can make their needs and grievances felt. And there is a certain inappropriateness involved, that the gentlemen—assuming for a moment that there is such a class—that the gentlemen should have to give an account of their doings to the *dēmos*, that the higher should give an account to the lower. There is a certain indignity involved in that. So how can you solve this difficulty? Answer: If you don't have a *dēmos*. If the tilling of the soil or other work of this kind is done by foreigners or slaves, that is one of the solutions, theoretically. All the problems caused at all times by the *dēmos* are solved by the nonexistence of the *demos*; but even this doesn't quite work out, because the slaves will not be nice all the time if they do not have the prospect of emancipation. After some generations you have the kind of *dēmos*, the free men, who can be as unruly as if they were already citizens. So it seems there is no elegant solution.

^{xi} One such incident would be Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts, in 1786 and 1787.

Session 10: November 8, 1967
Book 4, chapters 8–16

Leo Strauss: When Aristotle speaks of tyranny, there is one kind which he says is a barbaric form. What does this mean in terms more familiar to us?ⁱ

Student: Despotism.

LS: Despotism, yes, but this is of course a term which was introduced rather by Montesquieu in the eighteenth century, not here by Aristotle. But the thing called the Persian Empire, this would be a tyranny. But why is that so? By what right can Aristotle say that?¹ Strictly speaking, in a sense every subject, all subjects—including the princes of the blood—are slaves of the king. So in a later formula: there is only one free man, the king, and all others are slaves. This is of course not literally true, because quite a few people are free men and have slaves of their own, but ultimately there is no protection against the arbitrary² [wish] of the king. Something which shocks the Greeks especially is the way in which the subjects approached the king and which the Greeks called *proskynēsis*, which is right from the word for dog, coming down, like an utmost submissiveness unbecoming a free man.

I begin again with somewhat of a general introduction, and in a way all the details most of you, and I think all of you, will forget very soon unless you repeat the study of the *Politics*. But there are certain very general points which are not necessarily, not immediately Aristotelian, which we must somehow keep in mind whatever we do afterwards. Now from every point of view, we must try to understand what we are doing as political scientists. We must know what we are doing. Self-knowledge is absolutely necessary unless we are willing to be mere technicians, and that has no need for thinking but only for being good technicians.

Now what is implied in the fact that we are or desire to be up-to-date political scientists? That means we must try to clarify our primary assumptions, these humble assumptions which are perhaps never mentioned in classrooms but nevertheless are effective in whatever we do, and be it only an assumption that we ought to treat political things scientifically. That goes without saying, but that does not go properly without some thinking about it. We can also call it still more simply: we must clarify our elementary fundamental opinions. But our opinions, for example, that we must treat political matters scientifically, are not simply our opinions—I mean, not opinions which we generated on the basis of our experiences but the opinions we have taken over, which we have inherited. These are the sediments, we can say, of the opinions generated by early Americans. Therefore the clarification of our opinions requires understanding of those inherited opinions as originally meant, because when a man says today, “I want to treat political things scientifically,” he repeats John Stuart Mill. In a way he repeats Aristotle, and yet he means it differently. But we must understand it in the primary meanings in order to understand the present-day meaning, the present-day meaning being the result of a modification of the original meaning. We do not understand our opinions correctly if we do not understand them as due to modifications of earlier opinions and if

ⁱ Strauss addresses a student who read a paper at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

we do not understand the reasons why the modifications took place.

I give you one example of understanding as originally meant. One of the forefathers of what is called political science and what is understood as political science is I think universally admitted: Machiavelli. The ordinary approach to Machiavelli today is to say: Well, Machiavelli, that was a man of the Renaissance; and if we want to understand Machiavelli, we have first to understand the Renaissance and then see Machiavelli within this great movement. That is very plausible today, but that is not the way in which Machiavelli understood himself. Machiavelli didn't know that he was a member of or an inmate of the Renaissance. This appears so in retrospect; and on the contrary, our notion of Renaissance is partly derived from our knowledge of Machiavelli's work. But we must first see what Machiavelli intended and achieved as he meant it. Otherwise we miss something of great importance.

I would like to illustrate this for a moment by a more general example, because this concerns all the concepts we use in social science, for example, the concept like the intellectual, which you find you can use everywhere in political science, sociology, daily papers, novels, and what have you. There is a great problem hidden in this word. I read you a sentence from a French writer of the late³ [seventeenth] century, La Bruyère, and he says here that the man of letters cannot be important and he does not wish to be important.ⁱⁱ If we want to understand the intellectual, we have to consider this great modification of the notion of the man of letters who is not important, say, compared to the nobility or ruling service, and who does not even wish to be important. It is only a somewhat different form of the old distinction made by Plato and such people between the philosophers and the sophists. You can very well say, if you are an officer at the Internal Revenue Service or a statistician, that they are all intellectuals, and for these practical purposes it may be perfectly sufficient to treat them as if they were identical. But if you want to have a more than technical understanding and statistical understanding, this distinction between the philosopher and the technician, or between the man of letters—according to La Bruyère, a man who is not a man of letters may be very well much more important than all the other work we are doing in the social sciences.

This is only an illustration of the necessity of understanding various phenomena with which we are concerned as they are originally meant. Perhaps we can then show by a profound analysis, not by mere appearances, that self-understanding is inadequate—or as they say now, ideological—and must therefore be rejected. But we have to show that, and the fact that Karl Marx asserted that does not make it a proof, of course. From this point of view, we can say if we do not engage in this kind of reflection, we will be very parochial social scientists, as parochial as an old woman from a mountainous district in the most remote parts of Europe or of Asia. We only believe to be nonparochial because we read the newspapers, see over the TV screen about the countries of Europe and Asia. Perhaps we travel there and remain as parochial as we were when we set out—that is not an insignificant point.

Now if we take this task seriously, we are compelled sooner or later to pay special attention to Aristotle's *Politics*, the groundwork of political science. The theme, as I have said more than once and you have seen with your own eyes, is *politeia*, regime. Let us now put together the main

ⁱⁱ Jean de la Bruyère, *Characters*, trans. Henri Van Laun (London: John C. Nimmo, 1885), 136.

points we have learned about it. In every society there is a ruling part. Never do the laws as such fully rule, because the laws are the work of the ruling party. In other words, Aristotle by implication denies that there is such a thing as the general will of which Rousseau spoke. There can be a will directed toward the common good, but it is not a will issuing from the generality of the inhabitants of the *polis*. For if what rules is the will of the majority, the majority of adult freemen, let us say, then this is a democracy, i.e., rule of the poor, because the only stable majority is the majority of the poor; and the poor, however numerous they may be, are still a part.

Now that is the first point. The second point: every kind of regime has its specific end in view. In democracy, as Aristotle will explain later in book 6, the end is freedom. The title to participation in the regime is to be a freeborn man, and the end is freedom. That is a complicated question, which Aristotle will discuss later. The connection is this. The part, the ruling part, is dedicated to an end to which it is akin—say, oligarchy: wealth. The wealthy as wealthy are dedicated to the preservation and to the [. . .] of wealth. Now these two things come together in the assertion which we have heard today, that a regime is kind of a way of life of the city. What is a life, a way of life? This is aspirations and fulfillments, striving for ends and achieving these ends. Therefore the regime is the way of life in the city.

Now for a better understanding of the notion of regime, which no one has stated as clearly as Aristotle, we have to contrast the notion of regime with contemporary equivalents. These equivalents are such notions as—not government, that is too narrow—as society, civilization, or culture. Society is too nondescript, and culture is somewhat more meaty, and therefore I prefer this term. I will have to say one word about this notion. Originally culture, coming from the Latin word *cultura*, means a cultivation of the soil, in the first place, and then it is easily applied to the cultivation of the mind; and from this it follows that there is one and only one culture, namely, the proper cultivation of the mind. The wrong ones do not deserve to be called cultivations of the mind. This was the traditional notion which ruled until the nineteenth century, and then in the nineteenth century it became collaterally the usage to use it in the plural, as a very noble thing to speak of cultures, i.e., a variety of cultivations of the mind equally legitimate. What we find now in the daily use of the word is only the completely decayed version of that, where any recollection that it had once anything to do with the mind is completely forgotten.

What is a culture, then, according to the now vulgar notion? One can say exactly what Aristotle means of the regime, the [. . .] the way of life of society. But it is obviously something very different from regime because the regime, the political establishment, would be only a small part of the culture; there would be political, economic, social, religious, technological [parts] and so on. Let us say culture has *n* ingredients which are meant to be equal in principle. Now this is partly directed against the Marxist notion that there is a superstructure and an infrastructure, the infrastructure being the modes of production. And against this the ordinary notion of culture says we have no right to assume that the modes of production are determinative of the other ingredients of culture, which to that extent the concept of culture is an attempt to overcome a certain dogmatism.

Now, to see the main point. These end ingredients of culture—pottery, folklore, government, dances, etc.—are in principle equally [. . .] You look at them and try to understand them and see if

there is a connection between the various ingredients and a necessary ⁴[connection] between one another. This is indeed the case for the modern social scientist, who as such is a beholder in principle of all cultures, and all these concepts which he uses are meant to be tools for opening up any culture, be it one's own, be it a foreign culture, be it a present one, be it one of the past. But it is one thing to be a beholder of a culture and another thing to be a participant or, if one may say so, the inmate of a culture. For the inmate, things look different. The first step we take toward the understanding of Aristotle is if we make clear to ourselves the difference between the beholder and the participant. For the participant, not all ingredients of a culture are equal. There are some, to put it cautiously, which are looked up to and others which are there and are important but which are not looked up to. If people had, for example, various kinds of arts, ways of production, that does not mean that they look up to them. They may look up to the master of the art, but even that master of the art is not the ultimate thing to which they look up. There is a preponderance of that to which they look up; it is in the first place the end to which their society is dedicated. That means what Aristotle calls the end of the regime, of the whole order, the whole society as structured. But behind that regime and its end, in a way deeper than it, is the superhuman powers or power, the gods or god looked up to.

In Aristotle's *Politics*, the gods have receded into the back lot, as we have already seen and we will see more clearly in the future. I mentioned already the fact that the *polis* for Aristotle is something natural, as he says at the beginning, and this means also, and perhaps most importantly, it is not something holy. You must have read or heard in general civilization courses that the Greek *polis* was not simply a state but at the same time a church. I think that is one of the things that are generally said and which are, as a first statement, justifiable. But that would mean that the *polis* is something holy. This is no longer the case. Aristotle was not the first to effect the change; the greatest pre-Aristotelian document of that is to see its history, in which we have a religious understanding of the *polis*. This does not mean that Aristotle's *polis*, the *polis* as Aristotle understands it, is secular. That is a point of importance which I would like to mention already now. The secular state is a modern phenomenon. If we trace the secular state to its origin, we would arrive not at Machiavelli but at Hobbes. I quote to you the most significant passage in Hobbes, which I quoted in my *Natural Right in History*, page 199: "Hobbes's last word on the question of public worship is that the commonwealth *may* establish public worship. [And then run it down people's throats, of course, but it doesn't have to—LS] If the commonwealth fails to establish public worship, i.e., if it allows 'many sorts of worship,' as it may, 'it cannot be said . . . that the commonwealth is of any religion at all.'" ⁱⁱⁱ So this notion that the commonwealth is not of any religion at all is clearly stated by Hobbes in the *Leviathan*, chapter 31. Hobbes allows the sovereign to establish a religion. He may do that, but it is not a necessity. The commonwealth itself is [not] a religion and that means, in other words, religion is strictly private—which then became a demand, as you know, of the modern liberal movement. At the beginning is a man who at first glance does not look like a liberal: Thomas Hobbes.

Now if we try, then, in order to understand this somewhat better, this difference between Aristotle and Hobbes, what is a more precise formulation of this difference? I am sorry I cannot do better than to read you a few sentences from my *Natural Right* book, on page 198: "There was only one

ⁱⁱⁱ Strauss quotes his own quotation of Hobbes in *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 199 n. 43. The ellipsis appears in the text.

fundamental objection to Hobbes's basic assumption which he felt very keenly . . ." His doctrine is based on the view that fear of violent death is the root of civil order. "In many cases a fear of violent death proved to be a weaker force than the fear of hell fire or the fear of God. The difficulty is well illustrated by two widely separated passages of the *Leviathan*. In the first passage Hobbes says that the fear of the power of men (that is to say,^{iv} the fear of violent death), is 'commonly' greater than the fear of the power of 'spirits invisible,' that is to say, than religion. In the second passage he says that 'the fear of darkness and ghosts is greater than other fears,'" meaning than the fears of violent death, among others. So that is a clear contradiction, and Hobbes saw his way to solve it. "The fear of invisible powers is stronger than the fear of violent death as long as people believe in invisible powers, that is to say, as long as they are under the spell of delusions about the true character of the world;^v the fear of violent death," which is naturally the greatest fear, "comes fully into its own as soon as people have become enlightened . . . [T]he whole scheme suggested by Hobbes requires for its operation the weakening or, rather, the elimination of the fear of invisible powers."^{vi} As long as this fear is strong, there will be rule of the people who know best about the invisible power and how to appease them, i.e., the priest, and there will be constant turmoil and the power will not probably be in the hands of the authority.

Hobbes's scheme "requires such a radical change of orientation as can be brought about only by the disenchantment of the world [as it has well been called—LS], by the diffusion of scientific knowledge, or by popular enlightenment. Hobbes's is the first doctrine that necessarily and unmistakably points to a thoroughly 'enlightened,' that is to say, areligious or atheistic society as a solution of the social or political problem. This most important implication of Hobbes's doctrine was made explicit not many years after his death by Pierre Bayle, who attempted to prove that an atheistic society is possible" in his work on the comet, the comet which appeared in the year 1600 or so, and which has somewhat of a misleading title.^{vii} The main point, the core of the book, is the proof that an atheistic society is possible. No one had been atheistic before Bayle—and more than we ordinarily think, because they usually did not say that they were atheists for very good reasons, at least of prudence, sometimes of decency. But no one had suggested that an atheistic society is possible; and of course "no one," that includes also among many others Aristotle. An enlightened society, a rational society, in this sense of the word rational, is impossible from Aristotle's point of view, and it is possible from Hobbes's point of view—and that means also from the point of view of Hobbes's many successors. I thought it necessary to make this point.

Student: Is Hobbes's statement then that the sovereign may establish public religion . . .

LS: It depends on the circumstances.

Same Student: But I mean, ideally the sovereign should not establish . . .

^{iv} Strauss says "that is to say" where his text says "i.e."

^v Strauss says "the world" where his text says "reality."

^{vi} *Natural Right and History* (1950), 198.

^{vii} *NRH*, 198; Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2000).

LS: Ideally, the circumstances are so variable that nothing can be said in general about that, but the key point is that he may; there is no essential necessity. There was an indication of this somewhere in Machiavelli's *Discourses*, I think in book 1, chapter 10, where he says there was in the golden age of the Roman Empire, that was at the time of Marcus Aurelius and at the age of Anthony, there was complete freedom for everyone to hold and defend any opinion he wanted, any opinion without any question.^{viii} The passage is, I think, even more specific, but there is also something of this kind in Spinoza. If you have a very strong monarchy, you don't need an establishment, but if you want a republic, then the people must be religious. That is the teaching of people like Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Spinoza. But the point that precisely a republic can be secular, that is a novel doctrine. Of course, there was a movement toward freedom of religion on religious grounds, especially on the part of the independent sects; that is true, and a very important difference. But within political philosophy itself, the reasoning was this: to break the power of the church by the pullulating of sects. We are not confronted with one sacred authority but with *n*, and a shift of emphasis from the other world to this world, from theology to economics. This great, great moment when they said—the English clergyman, was it Edwards who said his trade is religion and his religion is trade?^{ix} He was one of those people who of course does not belong with the great men like Adam Smith who brought about this shift. The notion was that with the shift from theology to economics, to the solid goods of this world as distinguished from the airy goods of the other world, men do become reasonable and peaceful and a kind of heaven on earth. We know now that there was something wrong in this kindly convincing argument.

Student: Could you please define science?

LS: I use science loosely, that is quite true. I mean it in the first place as it is now understood, as it is practiced by the natural scientist and to some extent also by the social scientist, which in itself is a modification of earlier forms of science, say, physics, classical physics, Newtonian physics—and behind that the ancient form of that, Aristotle's or [. . .] But of course the one which gives its character to our world is post-classical. It is not in physics, twentieth-century physics or chemistry.

Same Student: Would you say then that the social scientists are actually scientists in practice?

LS: That is a very long question, and I cannot take up all questions at the same time. Therefore it is wise to leave it at the claims sometimes, without investigating the claim. But even the mere claim is not negligible, because this thought that since modern physics has manifest[ly] refuted the earlier forms of physics and there must be some virtue in it which enabled it to achieve this miracle, why should we not apply the same procedure to human things, to social things as well? This is a very impressive argument at first glance. Whether there are not difficulties and perhaps overwhelming difficulties in the way, that's not the question. I did not go into that question for the simple reason that that is enough for a day.

^{viii} Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 32–33 (1. 10.5).

^{ix} This epigram is by Bishop William Warburton, quoted in T. D. Fosbrooke, *An Original History of the City of Gloucester* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1819), 217.

Now let us then turn to our assignment. Near the beginning, in 1295a25, Aristotle states the character of the argument in books 4 to 6 of his *Politics*.

Reader:

But what is the best regime, and what is the best mode of life for most cities and most of mankind, if we do not judge by the standard of a virtue that is above the level of private citizens—

LS: Laymen, one could say, meaning people who do not specialize in virtue.

Reader:

or of an education that needs natural gifts and means supplied by fortune, nor by the standard of the best^x regime, but of a mode of life able to be shared by most men and a regime possible for most cities to attain?

LS: That corresponds to that gymnastics, not for those who will be top athletes but ordinary average men who will have a kind of average fitness. So this is the problem now.

Reader:

For the regimes called aristocracies, of which we spoke just now, in some cases fall somewhat out of the scope of most cities, and in others approximate what is called polity,^{xi} so that it is proper to speak of these two forms as if they were one. And indeed the decision in regard to all these questions is based on the same elementary principles. For if it has been rightly said in the *Ethics* that the happy life is the life that is lived without impediment in accordance with virtue, and that virtue is a middle course, it necessarily follows that the middle course of life is the best—such a middle course as it is possible for each class of men to attain. And these same criteria must also necessarily apply to the goodness and badness of a city, and of a regime, for a regime is a certain mode of life of a city. (1295a25-40)

LS: So this is not without difficulty. Aristotle says, as it were, we no longer speak of the best regimes strictly understood but of a kind of average regime which every city, unless it is particularly unfortunate, could have. Yet here he says in the second half of what we read that the standard, the ultimate standard to which he refers is that given in the *Ethics*: in the *Ethics* in which he had described, we can say, the perfect gentleman, a man who with all his virtues is a very rare bird. And to believe that you would find easily a citizen body consisting of such men, or mostly such men, is rather fantastic, and this is a great difficulty here.

Be this as it may, Aristotle makes now a new proposal going beyond what he said in the first half of book 4, which I presented last time in my schema, starting from democracy and oligarchy and having then a mean between the two on various levels. Now he has a very simple thesis. The best regime for every *polis* is the rule of the middle class. The right conduct is the choice of the mean between faulty extremes. Corresponding to that mean there is a mean between the two extremes,

^x Rackham has “ideal.”

^{xi} Rackham has “constitutional government.”

the rich and the poor, and the man from the middle class has so to speak the greatest chance of being a virtuous man. That does not mean that a rich man and even perhaps a poor man like Socrates can[’t] be virtuous, but it is more difficult for such people than for the middle class, for reasons which Aristotle indicates in the sequel. Doubtless Aristotle speaks here more on the level of ordinary practice than before. We read here only two passages in 1295b25.

Reader:

The city wishes to consist of equal and similar ones as much as possible,^{xii} and this similarity is most found in the middle classes. Therefore, the middle class state will necessarily be best constituted in respect of those elements of which we say that the state is by nature composed.

LS: What he called first the *polis* wishes to be, he says now, that is the *physis*, the nature of the *polis*, because the nature of a thing is what it means to be, what its end is—as we have seen from the example [of] the horse. The nature of the horse we see from the grown-up horse, the grown-up healthy horse, and that is what the horse intends to be from the time of its colthood on.

Reader:

And also this class of citizens has the greatest security in the states; for they do not themselves covet other men’s goods as do the poor, nor do the other classes covet their substance as the poor covet that of the rich. (1295b25-31)

LS: In other words, the middle class is in the most advantageous position for the *polis* as a whole because it is not exposed to the dangerous temptations to which both the rich and the poor are exposed. Therefore the possibility of a healthy city depends on the availability of a powerful middle class.

Student: I think that Aristotle has taken the principle of mean, golden mean, and action, the best action, and applied it in this case to the class who would rule best. I think maybe he’s [. . .] something that is not necessarily so.

LS: Sure. In other words, that there can be great crooks in the middle class goes without saying.

Same Student: He attempts to maintain a consistency . . .

LS: Not quite. He has an independent argument. He says: Look at the situation quite detached[ly], and then these people in a medium station are less exposed to temptations to which the upper and the lower class is exposed. That is all he says. In the first place, they don’t live in luxury; they have been trained in a certain reasonable frugality. That is one thing. On the other hand, they have those good qualities which come from owning property, and especially inherited property, [so] that they have not to develop the acquisitive and aggressive instinct in a way in which poorer people have to do. They are not exposed so much to the humiliations which go frequently with poverty.

Same Student: In other words, it is not really relevant for us today, with the middle class the

^{xii} Rackham has “the ideal of the state is to consist as much as possible of person that are equal and alike.”

way it is, to argue back . . .

LS: No. What is the chief reason why we cannot do that? Because of the great mobility. How many members of the present-day middle class are the children of middle-class parents? Not all. Aristotle thinks in terms of a stable society in which the middle class perpetuates itself at least for a generation. That's the great difference.

Same Student: It seems as though one would choose the mean in acting. I would choose to act in a moderate way; therefore my actions would be good, could be virtuous.

LS: A great chance, not necessarily. There are always black sheep.

Same Student: But does a member of the middle class choose to be a member of this somewhat golden mean class? Does he choose that status? It seems as if he doesn't choose that status, he will not choose that which goes along with that status.

LS: The difficulty which you have in mind, I believe, is the one I pointed out: that there is a kind of risky transition from the notion of virtue as a golden mean to the preference of the mean, middle class. It is justified only by this consideration: that other things being equal, a son of the middle class is more easily brought up to be a virtuous man than the son of a king, prince, or other kind of nobility on the one hand, and children of the poor on the other. Aristotle doesn't say more. The main point which I stated before: If you have the preferred case, the large middle class, the strong middle class in the city, they cannot possibly according to Aristotle's notions consist of truly virtuous men choosing the golden mean in every respect, of which he had spoken in the *Ethics*, because these are rare birds, and here we have a rather common plant. Excuse my mixed metaphor.

Student: I'd like to continue this one step further. I think it is very important. You've asserted throughout the whole semester that we mistake Aristotle's theories.

LS: Yes.

Same Student: And we must treat him as if he speaks to us.

LS: Yes.

Same Student: Now the great danger is that his definition of what the middle class is could be applied in part to our own society, that class which falls between the very wealthy and the very poor.

LS: Yes.

Same Student: The characteristics which he attributes to that middle class is very often attributed to that middle class in our own society by theorists of democracy; in other words, a stable democracy approaching what is a polity requires a middle class. Then we are confronted with the

situation of Nazi Germany, in which the middle class provide[d] the root of fascism.

LS: That is not so unqualifiedly true. In the first place, one would have to make a distinction, but it is generally disregarded in the folklore about Nazi Germany—which comes chiefly from liberal sources, liberal in the American sense of liberal—and it is the great importance of the Protestant peasantry for the victory of the Nazis. In addition, a considerable part of the working class, especially of the unemployed, of course followed the Nazis. I think [that] to say that this was simply a middle class movement is misleading. In addition, Aristotle never denied that this is meant as a general statement and not meant to be applicable to all situations. If we speak in terms of middle class, the German middle class economic basis was destroyed, at least terribly weakened, by the war and the following inflation. So it is not a good example [. . .] does not refute the general assertion that other things being equal, the middle class is a class which makes most for stability.

There are other difficulties which Aristotle's thesis exposes, but I think that was not so simple; and in addition, one point which I believe I stated which was surely implied in everything I said: that modern societies, contemporary societies, are radically different from all earlier societies and surely from the societies which Aristotle could consider, because of these two related facts. First, the emergence of technology on the basis of science; and second, popular enlightenment and all the things going with that which are ingredients of all present-day societies. Therefore a direct applicability of Aristotelian politics to what is going on now is impossible. What I maintain is only that the fundamental concept, namely, that of the regime, is a better tool of analysis, to use this jargon, than those now available.

Student: A small point. Did a member of the middle class have to work for his living?

LS: Not with his hands, but of course, yes. Now in the immediate sequel Aristotle develops in what way the rule the middle class is more stable than that of the extremes. We cannot read that, and we have to make a selection. 1296a32.

Reader:

Moreover each of the two states that in the past held the leadership of Greece—

LS: Meaning Sparta and Athens.

Reader:

took as a pattern the form of government that existed among themselves and set up in the one case democracies and in the other oligarchies—

LS: Therefore they did not set up rules of the middle class, but rules either of the poor or of the rich.

Reader:

not considering the interest of the cities but their own advantage. Hence owing to these causes the middle form of constitution either never comes into existence or seldom and in few places; for one

man only among the states that have formerly held the leadership was induced to grant this form of organization, and by this time it has become a fixed habit with the people of the separate cities also not even to desire equality, but either to seek to rule or to endure being under a master. (1296a32-b1)

LS: Now this is a crucial passage, and that is a much more severe criticism of Aristotle than you suggested. If this best regime in the now watered-down sense, not best regime in the strictest sense or even in a secondary sense mentioned last time, if even this best regime of the third degree practically never existed, is this not the basis for a very powerful objection to Aristotle's whole enterprise, that what he presents or aims after is something fantastic, a utopia? One can say that this was indeed the starting point of the modern development, in that famous chapter 15 of Machiavelli's *Prince*, where he says hitherto the people who have written about principalities and commonwealth have presented imaginary commonwealths. The reason is because they took their bearings by how men ought to live, and he is going to change that: he will take his bearings by how men do live, and therefore he will arrive at useful and practical⁵ [rules]. One can say that the whole later development of modern times can be understood on the basis of this Machiavellian remark.

Aristotle, as Plato too, asserts that his best regime is possible; but if it is proved to have been never actual, one may very well say this possibility is of no great value. There may be a so-called sociological possibility, not containing a manifest self-contradiction, but not a genuine possibility, namely, that you show how it is possible on the basis of what specific conditions. In modern times, the doctrines therefore were concerned with the orders and the arrangements of civil societies. The likelihood of this accusation was very great, and that meant lowering the standards: not being concerned so much with virtue but concerned with the lower goals originally called self-preservation—or call it the greatest happiness of the greatest number. There are various formulations, but fundamentally the character of the argument is the same.

Even in the more extreme forms, to show the necessity of the actualization of the desirable regime, the most favorable example of the latter is of course Marx, where you have a regime or rather a society, a perfectly just society which is not a utopia but which is according to the claim necessarily actual. This concern with the necessity of actualization, and even with likelihood of actualization, plays no role in Aristotle, and of course not in Plato. Therefore the talk about Aristotle's realism is truly misleading. Why did Aristotle nevertheless continue to do these things which seem so fantastic? If we continue where we left off, we will find an answer.

Reader: 1296b2.

These considerations therefore make it clear which is the best constitution, best regime, and why it is the best; and now that the best has been defined, it is not difficult to see, among the other forms of regimes (inasmuch as we pronounce that there are various forms of democracy and various oligarchies), what kind is to be placed first, what second, and what next in this order, by reason of one being better and another worse. For at each stage the form nearest to the best one must necessarily be superior, and the form that is more remote from the middle must be inferior—unless one is judging relatively to given conditions: I make this reservation because it is quite possible that although one form of

regime is preferable it may often be more advantageous for certain people to have another form. (1296b2-12)

LS: The main point is this—I mean the argument in favor of Plato’s and Aristotle’s so-called utopianism. Needless to say, there are modern political figures who [. . .] that, but they don’t have the rank of Plato and Aristotle, and they are not as characteristic of modern times as the other ones are. We need a standard of judgment, and a clear and clean standard. As long as we are concerned with this, the question of actualization and likelihood of actualization is secondary.

Let us start with what is easily accessible today: the factual assumptions that democracy is preferable to the available alternatives. But no one will say that democracy as we find it in this country, or in any other country, is perfect. There is⁶ the reasonable wish for improvements. This is implied, the notion of a perfect democracy. Whether this perfect democracy is anywhere in existence or will be anywhere in existence is a secondary question. What is implied in these judgments is [that] these and these are the characteristics of a perfect democracy. The same would apply to other regimes. This would of course lead to the question: Is the perfect democracy the best regime? That would ultimately be the question.

Student: Are you saying that in America we tend to improve on democracy and that we are therefore [. . .] as a perfect democracy?

LS: Is this not implied? The American democracy has certain imperfections. By this very fact, you claim to have the knowledge of the perfections corresponding to the present-day imperfections. Some things are good, others are not so good; and then you can have everything implied in the whole procedure. Whether anyone in fact takes the trouble of elaborating the complete picture is another matter. I know that this thought is open to quite a few objections, but this is the starting point.

The primary concern of Plato’s and Aristotle’s politics is to have a clear standard of judgment which gives coherence to the many incoherent judgments we make all the time about political institutions. The usual objection today would probably be this: that this presupposes a kind of static, fixing condition which is incompatible with human life. But the question is, granted that there is no regime, however good, which will not perish sooner or later, that would still be the difference within a good regime and a bad regime. Just as [with] human beings: we are all mortal, and when we are dead, no one can see or notice how we live by looking at our corpses; yet it does make a difference whether we live good or well. How long we live good or well is a much less important question and is surely not dependent upon our doings. Why should the same not be true of societies? Therefore the question of [a] standard of judgment remains although we know that no order, however perfect, will last forever. Not even a Marxist can claim that his classless society at which they allegedly aim will last forever. Read only Engels on Feuerbach, where he says: Well, of course there will finally be something like a destruction of all human life on earth, and naturally that will also be the end of the classless society, but that is [a] long, long [way] off. Now this is a very good practical consideration, I admit, but theoretically of course not quite satisfactory. If the most perfect toward which men always have aimed unwittingly, if this great perfection will collapse in the [. . .] of the universe, so the question of eternity of human arrangements is impossible. No one can sensibly expect that.

There is one point, I believe, that we should discuss at any rate because of its very great importance—and there are other things which we must leave until next time—and that is this. We have seen the kinship between the last part of book 4, the content of that part, and the notion of the three powers: the legislative, the executive, and the judicial powers. Yes, but what is the difference? You see, it is always at least as important to see the differences as agreements. Everyone who knows a little bit of political matters sees at once that there is a certain kinship between what Aristotle does here when he speaks of the deliberative ingredient, the magistracy, the judiciary, and the three powers. What is the difference? Otherwise, we will not understand a word of what Aristotle says, or for that matter, we do not understand the separation of powers.

Student: When we take the legislative today, we think of its primary function as the enactment of laws, whereas Aristotle sees this as only one element of the deliberative and one which can in fact be transferred.

LS: In other words, we limit the deliberative to the legislative. For Aristotle, it is clear that the deliberative body decides about war and peace, big crimes, and other matters. That is very important and connected, but is not the fundamental importance.

What does Aristotle do in general in this part of the book? He distinguishes three kinds of powers which must be present in every regime. He does not separate powers. He does not say a word to the effect that these powers must be separated in different hands. That is something very different and much more important than any particular variation. What does this mean in argument? What is the ground for this change from the distinction of powers to the separation of powers, and how would one go about in order to find out that reason? Who is the hero of the separation of powers, as distinguished from the distinction of powers? Montesquieu is the first—the greatest respect to the *Federalist Papers*, but one must go first to Montesquieu. Why is Montesquieu concerned with the separation of powers? He says it explicitly: the concern with the security of⁷ the individual. The individual must never be exposed to the total mass, as it were, of the power of the commonwealth but only to a part checked by others. This concern with security of the individual is a guiding concern of Montesquieu, but not the guiding concern of Aristotle. We can easily understand that if we trace back the security of the individual to its theoretical origin, and that is self-preservation, the principle of Hobbes and Locke. If that is the principle, then it is a necessary consequence which Montesquieu drew—helped quite a bit by the practical example of British institutions, without any question.

We must also distinguish this Montesquieuan proposal from a kindred but fundamentally different form, namely, this. It is trivial to say that this massive power of the commonwealth will crush everyone, and therefore let us separate it and divide it into parts. That is simple, commonsensical, but that you find, for example, in Polybius, book 6,^{xiii} when he analyzes a Roman republican constitution—which incidentally is a model for Montesquieu's analysis of the English constitution in book 11 of *The Spirit of Laws*. What Polybius suggests is this: you just split it up, this mass. There is no principle in that. The exact division, the splitting up, the combination of the principle, namely, the three powers, with the desire to weaken the

^{xiii} Polybius, *The Histories*, esp. 6.3–18, but also 6.43–58.

whole of the commonwealth over an individual, that is Montesquieu's, and is taken over and very interestingly modified in the *Federalist Papers*.

This other point which you mentioned, that for Aristotle—as well as Locke and the American Constitution—of the three parts, the most important is the deliberative or the legislative. So this body, the deliberative body, and not the magistrates, not the executive, are the government *par excellence*. That is the traditional notion of republican government, and I don't wish to make any application of this to the emasculation of Congress and so on. That is another matter.

Deliberative is replaced by legislative, and this is already done by law, and that⁸ [the American] Constitution here simply follows from. But what is a motive for that? Again, security. Every action within civil society must be action according to law, and therefore the sovereign body is a legislative body, the body which establishes the laws. What the executive does—say, the chief magistrates do, for example, regarding war and peace—that cannot be determined in advance by law. And that was at least the Lockean doctrine, because you don't know what the enemies will do: they may be very quick and waste no time for the declaration. Pearl Harbor is the most obvious example, and the next time, God forbid, it might be too late for any declaration ever. But at any rate, this foreign policy is very important. It cannot be subjected to the legislation of any civil society, and therefore that is taken out at the hands of the deliberative body and given to the executive; and, as you know, in the *Federalist Papers* and the Constitution, that is changed because the founders thought that meant giving too much power to the president; and therefore the famous “advice and consent” of the senators.

Student: In what sense do we say that the notion of the separation of powers in the *Federalist* and Montesquieu sense stems from ultimately Locke and Hobbes, when we consider also that the contrary Jacobin notion of unifying power also is in a sense a modern doctrine and has its origins in Locke and Hobbes?

LS: The theoretical root—and that is a very complicated question, but to some extent that is true of the Jacobin doctrine and is not Hobbes and Locke but a more advanced modern doctrine. In addition, you know that it was really the Convention and not the executive which acted; the deliberative body was still the ruling body and not any magistrate as magistrate in the French Convention. There is one point which we might read, and then we will call it a day.

Reader: 1299a14.

Nor is it easy to decide to what kinds of office the name of magistracy ought to be applied—

LS: In other words, the traffic policeman who has also the right to command. Is he a magistrate? Where to draw the line?

Reader:

for the political community requires a great many officials, owing to which it is not proper to reckon all of them magistrates, whether elected by vote or by lot,—for instance first the priests (for this office must be considered as something different from the political magistracies). (1299a14-17)

LS: That is quite clear. It is not the first mention but the first brief discussion of priests. This is not a political office, although they are of course elected and to that extent they are functionaries of the *polis*, but their office is not a political office. Why not? The *polis* has its gods. In Socrates's accusation, he doesn't worship the gods which the *polis* worships as its gods. But clearly the gods do not belong to the *polis*; they are in a way an outside power like a foreign power, like Sparta, but on a different level. This is the reason why the priestly function cannot be called simply a political function. We will hear more about this in book 6.

Session 11: November 13, 1967**Book 4, chapters 12–16 revisited; book 5, chapters 1–7**

Leo Strauss: You raised the question: Why is Aristotle concerned with the preservation of any regime so that he can give advice to democrats, oligarchs, kings, tyrants, aristocrats, and what have you? You said the answer is that he is a conservative man, adverse to change if it can be helped.ⁱ This is not sufficient. But when you tried to give an explanation of your own, I had the feeling that you only analyzed what is ordinarily meant by being conservative—cautious—or as you called it later on, that he is a moderate man and therefore opposed to all immoderate actions, immoderate measures; and that is to say opposed to all revolutions unless the situation is absolutely unbearable. Is that not so?

Student: What I meant was just saying that Aristotle is conservative doesn't get you anywhere without going into it deeply. And I have a list of a number of passages that are traditional conservative presuppositions, and people take them and say: Aha, he's a conservative.

LS: You were not guilty of that; you took the word seriously. One can also say: Why is he in favor of the preservation of any regime? Because generally speaking, a regime can only be preserved by becoming moderate, more moderate, and this is always an improvement, even in the case of tyranny, as we shall see next time.

Now there is one more point which I would like to mention briefly: the translation. The people usually speak of revolutions in the translations of book 5. The words which Aristotle uses are, first, *metabolē*, which is now used in metabolism and which simply means change, according to any change. Say, a green leaf when it becomes yellow; that's *metabolē*. Any change. The other word is *stasis*, and *stasis* is best translated in this context by "rising." There is indeed no word which can be properly translated by revolution, because what is the meaning of revolution, the word revolution originally? Returning to the same place. The revolutions which they had in these bodies—this was quite a job until this could be applied to political changes, namely, only under the premise that political changes are as regular as the movements of the heavenly bodies.

In a way there is such a doctrine in Polybius, and in a way in Plato's *Republic*, according to which there is a certain change from the republic from kingship down to tyranny, and then back again to kingship. That is not elaborated by Plato, but it is a possible adaptation. In Polybius it is more explicit, but even there people didn't speak of revolutions. I do not know when the term came up for the first time; probably in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Student: Does Aristotle distinguish in his use of the word *metabolē* from *stasis*? Because presumably one could have what we would call a rising or rebellion without any permanent quality of change occurring in the regime. It just simply could be put down.

LS: It's a good question. I do not know. One would have to make a statistic of the terms in book 5. But surely successful risings are parallel to what is now called revolutions. The question would

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

be whether *stasis* could not be applied to unsuccessful risings, whereas metabolic change could mean, of course, a change that has succeeded. That is a question which would have to be investigated.

There are a few problems.ⁱⁱ “The state most truly changes when its constitution changes.” This is a paper on the first part of book 3. “Although its size, population, or racial composition may change, if the constitution remains unchanged, the state is essentially the same.” This is very ambiguous. On what does the identity of a city depend? Aristotle says that the identity depends chiefly or most importantly on the regime, but it does not depend exclusively on it, because otherwise two different cities with identically the same regime would be one city. We have cities A and B, and both have the same kind of democracy. A and B are different cities, undeniably. If the regime were the only thing which gave unity, then they would be one. The other things, locality and what have you, are also important.

One more point: “The state is not merely the human soul writ large, as in Plato’s *Republic*. Such a concept neglects the essential difference between the good men and good citizens.” I think there is something wrong here. What about the distinction between the good man and good citizens applied to the members of the lowest class in Plato’s *Republic*? Are they good citizens? Yes, they are good citizens because they are just, just in the sense that they stay in their stations and are satisfied with it and do their functions. Are they good men? No.

Student: You suggested that Aristotle’s concern with the preservation of all regimes and its link to his concern with justice is in the fact that generally speaking the preservation of any regime can only be achieved by making the regime more moderate. What is the logic here?

LS: If you have a bad regime—because in the case of good regimes there is no question that Aristotle should be in favor of their preservation—the question is only: Why should he be in favor of the preservation of¹ [inferior] regimes? The answer is this: As a rule, the regime will be preserved the more easily the more it is moderate.

Same Student: It’s precisely that statement that I want a justification for. It seems to me that it is possible to preserve an inferior regime, shall we say, by simply increasing the repression.

LS: But the question is whether that is not generally true, that such repressive regimes generally will not make it of short duration. You mean the immense success of Stalin is an objection?

Same Student: I wasn’t thinking of Stalin; I was thinking of the Union of South Africa.

LS: That is a complicated thing, which Aristotle does not discuss, but what is provided for, namely, that there is a heterogeneity on a racial basis—so the question is not simply democracy or oligarchy, but the question is the proper balance between the races.

Now before we turn to our discussion, I would like to refer to a statement. He refers here to the question of the character of Aristotle’s view that the supreme consideration in social matters is

ⁱⁱ The transcriber notes: “Strauss now discusses another paper.”

political in contradistinction to social or private. We are inclined today to make the opposite assumption. The political is in the service of the social group or of the private. Now² [to take] a most famous formula, the pursuit of happiness is private. That means it is everyone's private affair. The reason ultimately is that there is no universally valid meaning of happiness. To pursue happiness means to pursue happiness as I understand happiness. If I have³ [the right] to pursue happiness as a government understands happiness, then I do not have the right to pursue happiness in the modern sense of the term. In addition, I do not owe anyone an account of my understanding of happiness. That means happiness is—using modern terms—radically subjective, but the right to the pursuit of happiness is not, at least in this sense: The right to the pursuit of happiness, a political phenomenon, is superior to the pursuit of happiness as something which is either subpolitical or suprapolitical. To that extent, supremacy of the political comes out even under modern conditions.

Here is a remark which is of some interest perhaps to the class. Sir David Ross, a famous Aristotelian scholar, has called the most important work on Aristotle published since the publication of Jaeger's work in 1923, the book *Aristotle* by Professor John Herman Randall, Jr.ⁱⁱⁱ Now Randall translates *polis* by "society." In addition, he deems it necessary to place quotation marks around the word political, but not around the word social. So half-conscience, meaning conscientiously in one case, and less conscientiously in the other case. When paraphrasing Aristotle [. . .] forced to speak of political science, but when speaking of the facts of life, he quotes "of men's social and cultural life as they are known today," he speaks of the historian and anthropologist. You see here the difficulty which comes up but which is not clearly and squarely faced.

There were some passages in the last assignment which we cannot neglect, in 1296b13 following.

Reader:

The next thing after what has been said is to discuss which regime is advantageous for which people, and what sort of regime for what sort of people. Now we must first grasp a general principle that applies equally to all sorts of regimes: it is essential that the part of the city that wishes the regime to remain to be stronger than the part that does not wish it.

LS: That is crucial. It's elementary, truly elementary. Without it, one cannot begin to understand political science.

Reader:

But every city consists of both quality and quantity: by quality I mean freedom, wealth, education, good birth, and by quantity the superior numbers of the many.^{iv} And it is possible that, while the quality of the⁴ [city] belongs to one among the parts to which the city consists and its quantity to another part—for example the low-born may be more numerous than the noble or the poor than the rich,—yet the more numerous class may not exceed in quantity as much as they fall behind in quality. Hence these two factors have to

ⁱⁱⁱ Werner Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development*, trans. Richard Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934); and John Herman Randall, *Aristotle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

^{iv} Rackham has "multitude."

be judged in comparison with one another. Where therefore the multitude of the poor exceeds in the proportion stated, here it is natural for there to be democracy. (1296b13-26)

LS: So that is a very strange point, because Aristotle had said earlier, in the latter part of book 3, that the bad regimes, i.e., democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny, are nowhere natural. Now he admits that under certain conditions it is natural. That is a very grave admission and has very grave consequences for the whole assertion that the *polis* is natural. I thought I should draw your attention to the question. Now a little bit later, in 1296b38.

Reader:

And where the number of the middle class exceeds both the extreme classes together, or even one of them only, here it is possible for a constitutional government, a polity,^v to be lasting; for there is no fear of the rich ever coming to terms with the poor against this numerous middle class.

LS: This is another point where Aristotle seems to be wrong and to not have considered things which we have observed. For instance, Tory democracy, where Winston Churchill's father, and Disraeli, and others connected, [was] an attempt of the landed aristocracy to make an alliance with the working class against the mill owners and the bourgeoisie altogether. Now is this not an objection to Aristotle? Does this not show a defect of his scheme? What would you say? Well, how successful was it? How long did it last? The real change came shortly after, when the Liberal Party under Lloyd George^{vi} by its very radical approach won over the working class to its very radical reforms. This, I believe, one could say. Now there is one more passage in 1300a4, following. He speaks of certain magistracies as directed to certain regimes.

Reader:

But a Superintendent of Children and a Superintendent of Women, and any other magistrates that exercise a similar sort of supervision, are an aristocratic feature, and not democratic (for how is it possible to prevent the wives of the poor from going out of doors?) nor yet oligarchic (for the wives of oligarchic rulers are luxurious). (1300a4-8)

LS: This throws some light on what Aristotle's moral tastes are and has of course great application to such questions as censorship and so on. Now let us turn to book 5, the changes and in particular the destruction of the various regimes. Now let us read a few passages from the beginning, line 25 following.

Reader:

And we must first assume the starting-point, that many forms of regime have come into existence with everybody agreeing to what is just, that is proportionate equality, but failing to attain it (as has also been said before).

LS: Now let us turn to line 35.

^v The reader adds "a polity."

^{vi} David Lloyd George (1863–1945), Liberal member of parliament and Welsh nationalist. He served as prime minister from 1916 to 1922.

Reader:

Now all the regimes have contained something just,^{vii} but from an absolute point of view they are erroneous; and owing to this cause, when each of the two parties has not got the share of the regime which accords with the fundamental assumption that they happen to entertain, class war ensues. Of all men, those who excel in virtue would most justifiably stir up faction, since they are least given to doing so; for they alone can with the fullest reason be deemed absolutely unequal.

LS: In other words, we have this point: the beginnings, the origins of any such changes are the notions of justice. These notions are not necessarily true notions and may be wrong notions, but they are nevertheless politically most effective. That is to say, it is not simply interest but a notion of justice, because people who are not criminals do make distinction between their interest, by hook and by crook, and their rights. Aristotle refers here to this. He develops this theme in the sequel, and we cannot read this all. Now let us read in 1302a8, about the virtue of democracy.

Reader:

Nevertheless, democracy is safer and more free from civil strife, *stasis*,^{viii} than oligarchy; for in oligarchies two kinds of strife spring up, faction between different members of the oligarchy and also faction between the oligarchs and the people, whereas in democracy only strife between the people and the oligarchical party occurs, but party strife between different sections of the people itself does not occur to any degree worth mentioning. And again the government formed of the middle classes is nearer to the people than to the few, and it is the safest of the kinds of regime mentioned. (1302a8-15)

LS: In other words, this very great political virtue of stability is here ascribed to democracy more than to anything else. That is quite interesting, and quite amazing also. But here this point that he makes that in democracies there is hardly any intra-*dēmos* trouble, whereas in an oligarchy you have not only the conflict between the rich and the poor, but also among the rich. Aristotle states it as a fact without going into the reason. What must he have had in mind, saying that in democracies there is no such intra-*dēmos* conflict?

Student: There is no reason for conflict because the differences in wealth are not that great . . .

Student: In democracies, the principle is living as you like, and therefore people are less prone to be against the regime because they are able to live as they like.

LS: But still, could there not be very different notions of what is a pleasant life? Could there not be, as it were, gangs among the juveniles? No, I think what Aristotle has in mind is that ambition and the desire for superiority will be less powerful among the people who have to earn a living, and that is a point to which he refers more than once. Of course, as one of you remarked, Aristotle does not discuss here at all the case of racial or religious heterogeneity of the *dēmos*, which could of course give rise to quite a bit of [. . .] Now let us consider the immediate sequel.

Reader:

^{vii} Rackham has "All these forms of constitution then have some element of justice."

^{viii} The reader adds "*stasis*."

And since we are considering what circumstances give rise to party factions and transformations in regimes,^{ix} we must first ascertain their origins and causes generally. They are, speaking roughly, three in number, which we must first define in outline separately. (1302a16-19)

LS: Now here is a point that was already made before. What seems to be the foreground of Aristotle's understanding of such changes is what notions of justice or what notions of right, and he made the people concerned. That is the case, but there is something particular about it which we will not properly see if we look entirely to Aristotle and do not look at other political philosophers. I have here Hobbes's *Leviathan*, chapter 29: "Of those things that Weaken, or tend to the Dissolution of a Common-wealth." He gives many reasons, but I read only a few passages. "In the second place, I observe the Diseases of a Common-wealth, that proceed from the poyson of seditious doctrines; whereof one is, *That every private man is Judge of Good and Evill actions* . . . Another doctrine repugnant to Civill Society, is, that *whatsoever a man does against his Conscience, is Sinne* . . . A fourth opinion, repugnant to the nature of a Commonwealth, is this, *That he who has the Sovereign Power, is subject to the Civill Lawes*," and so on.^x Then he mentions other false doctrines.

Here there is an important difference. What Aristotle has in mind by this use of right, and in particular about the false use of right, are not doctrines in the sense of Hobbes. This has something to do with the fact that in modern times there gradually emerged the phenomenon and also the concept of ideologies. In Aristotle there is no place for ideologies. If the poor think that because we are the mass of the fighters, the mass of the free men, and therefore we ought to have decisive say, this is according to Aristotle an erroneous view because there are other views which are equally to be considered, but it is not an ideology. If the rich say, "We pay the taxes and we make possible your big army and navy and what have you, and therefore we ought to be the decisive say," that is an opinion—a wrong opinion, but not an ideology, because there is no concealment in any way in war. The rich say: "We are rich, and because we are rich we demand this right."

In Hobbes you have the presence of opinions not stemming directly from political life but in most cases here from theologians or lawyers, which affect considerable classes of people and therefore become politically relevant. They are not direct outgrowths of political life itself. I draw your attention to this fact because a great misuse is made of the term ideology.

Student: Could one also say that in the claims which give rise to revolution, would Aristotle admit that they always have some view toward justice, and this embodies some sense of justice, whereas for Hobbes, they are pernicious and poisonous and not really worthy of any consideration?

LS: For Hobbes the simple principle of justice is what is implied in the absolute character of the right of self-preservation. In other words, no man has a right to his freedom or to his wealth except by the grace of his sovereign. Therefore these claims have no basis, ultimately, in Hobbes, whereas in Aristotle they have.

^{ix} Rackham has "revolutions in constitutions."

^x Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 223–24.

Aristotle has spoken first here in what state of mind people make risings, and then the question arises, in answer of some notion of right; and second, for the sake of which things do men make risings; and third, which are the causes, the origins of political confusions and trouble? Now, first for the sake of which they make risings, he says in 1302a32.

Reader:

The objects about which it is waged are gain and honor, and their opposites, for men carry on party faction in cities in order to avoid dishonor and loss, either on their own behalf or on behalf of their friends. And the causes and origins of the disturbances which occasion the actual states of feelings described and their direction to the objects mentioned, according to one account happen to be seven in number, though according to another they are more. Two of them are the same as those spoken of before although not operating in the same way: the motives of gain and honor also stir men up against each other not in order that they may get them for themselves, as has been said before, but because they see other men in some cases justly and in other cases unjustly getting a larger share of them. (1302a32-b2)

LS: The primary concern is not with honor or position, but with the unjust distribution of honor and position.

Reader:

Other causes are insolence, fear, excessive predominance, contempt, disproportionate growth of power; and also other modes of cause are election intrigue, carelessness, pettiness, dissimilarity. Among these motives the power possessed by insolence and gain, and their mode of operation, is almost obvious; for when the men in office show insolence and greed, people rise in revolt against one another and against the regimes that afford the opportunity for such conduct; and greed preys sometimes on private property and sometimes on common funds. It is clear also what is the power of honor and how it can cause party faction; for men form factions both when they are themselves dishonored and when they see others honored; and the distribution of honors is unjust when persons are either honored or dishonored against their deserts, just when it is according to desert. (1302b2-14)

LS: Let us leave it at that and turn to b33 in the same section for some special examples.

Reader:

Changes of regimes^{xi} take place on account of disproportionate growth; for just as the body is composed of parts, and needs to grow proportionately in order that its symmetry may remain, and if it does not it is spoiled, when the foot is four cubits long and the rest of the body two spans, and sometimes it might even change into the shape of another animal if it increased disproportionately not only in size but also in quality, so also a city is composed of parts, one of which often grows without its being noticed, as for example the number of the poor in democracies and polity. And sometimes this is also brought about by accidental occurrences, as for instance at Tarentum when a great many notables were defeated and

^{xi} Rackham has "revolutions in the constitutions."

killed by the Iapygians a short time after the Persian Wars. (1302b33-1303a5)

LS: And so these are all forms which have to be considered. In 1303a25, we come to South Africa.

Reader:

Also difference of race is a cause of faction, until harmony of spirit is reached; for just as any chance multitude of people does not make a city, so a city is not formed in any chance period of time. Hence most of the cities that have hitherto admitted joint settlers or additional settlers have split into factions. (1303a25-28)

LS: The case of South Africa is much graver, because these would all be now called racially of the same stock. Now let us turn to a few more sections, in 1303b17.

Reader:

Factions arise therefore not about but out of small matters; but they are carried on about great matters. (1303b17)

LS: The beginnings can be very slight and small, and he gives many examples of very petty beginnings in the sequel; and yet what they are about always will be big things: control of the commonwealth.

Reader: 1304a38.

And regimes also undergo revolutions when what are thought of as opposing sections of the state become equal to one another, for instance the rich and the people, and there is no middle class or only an extremely small one; for if either of the two sections becomes much the superior, the remainder is not willing to risk an encounter with the manifestly stronger opponent. Owing to this men who are exceptional in virtue generally speaking do not cause faction, because they find themselves few against many. (1304a38-b5)

LS: A reason which is not entirely virtuous, but in the ordinary sense prudential. One wonders whether he wrote this with a tongue in his cheek.

Reader:

Universally then in connection with all the forms of regime the origins and causes of factions and transformations are of this nature. The means used to cause transformations^{xii} of regime are sometimes force and sometimes fraud. Force is employed either when the revolutionary leaders assert compulsion immediately from the start and later on—as indeed the mode of using fraud is also twofold: sometimes the changers^{xiii} after completely deceiving the people at the first stage alter the regime with their consent, but then at a later stage retain their hold on it by force against the people's will: for instance, at the time of the Four Hundred, they deceived the people by saying that the Persian King would supply money for the war against the Spartans, and after telling them this falsehood endeavored to

^{xii} Rackham has "revolutions."

^{xiii} Rackham has "revolutionaries."

keep a hold upon the government; but in other cases they both persuade the people at the start and afterwards repeat the persuasion and govern them with their consent. (1304b6-17)

LS: There are a few more passages which deserve our attention. Let us turn to 1305a7.

Reader:

And in old times whenever the same man became both leader of the people and general—

LS: “Leader of the people” is in Greek *dēmagōgos*, demagogue, which does not necessarily have the negative meaning which it now has.

Reader:

they used to change the regime to a tyranny; for almost the largest number of the tyrants of the early days have risen from being leaders of the people. And the reason why this used to happen then but does not do so now is because then the leaders of the people were drawn from those who held the office of general (for they were not yet skilled in oratory), but now when rhetoric has developed the able speakers are leaders of the people, but owing to their inexperience in military matters they are not put in control of these, except insofar as something of the kind had taken place to a small extent in some places. (1305a7-15)

LS: To what would he refer by this conditional clause?

Student: Cleon?

LS: Probably, at least the most famous case now known. Now that other point is quite interesting. In the olden times, there were not yet powerful speakers, and now rhetoric has arisen. So that is one example of that progress of the arts which Aristotle discussed, as you may remember, in the section on Hippodamus in the second book. From Aristotle’s point of view, this is a progress. Rhetoric is a genuine art and its presence marks⁶ [a real] progress.

Did you see that Aristotle answered your question? At least he has provided for it. He saw the possibility of revolution as being violent change on the basis of racial heterogeneity. How he would decide such issue in a given case is another thing.

Reader: 1306b6.

And revolution and transformations^{xiv} also occur from an accident, both in what is called polity^{xv} and in those oligarchies in which membership of the council and the law courts and tenure of the other offices are based on a property qualification. For often the qualification first having been fixed to suit the circumstances of the time, so that in an oligarchy a few may be members and in a polity the middle classes, when peace or some other good fortune leads to a good harvest it comes about that the same properties become worth many times as large an assessment, so that all the citizens share in all the rights, the

^{xiv} The reader adds “and transformations.”

^{xv} Throughout this passage the reader says “polity” where Rackham has “constitutional government.” This modification is henceforth made throughout and will no longer be noted.

change sometimes taking place gradually and⁷ little by little and not being noticed, but at other times more quickly. (1306b6-16)

LS: This is another example throwing light on the way in which Aristotle looks at this phenomenon. One can state it loosely as follows. Aristotle denied that there is a system. There are *n* possibilities of conjunctions, and each must be considered in its own character. There is not one schema of changes, as Plato seemed to have suggested in the *Republic*. He will discuss this explicitly in the second half of book 5. This is a change which no one could have foreseen: it just happened, and yet it is of sizable importance for the people concerned. Let us turn to 1307a5 following.

Reader:

But the actual overthrow of both polities^{xvi} and aristocracies is mostly due to a deviation from justice in the actual framework of the regime.^{xvii} For what starts it in the case of a polity is that it does not contain a good blend of democracy and oligarchy; and in the case of an aristocracy it is the lack of a good blend of those two elements and of virtue, but chiefly of the two elements (I mean popular government and oligarchy), for both polities and most of the constitutions that are called aristocracies aim at blending these. For this is the point of distinction between aristocracy and what are called polities, and it is owing to this that some of them are less and others more stable; for the regimes inclining more towards oligarchy men call aristocracies and those inclining more to the side of the many^{xviii} constitutional governments, owing to which those of the latter sort are more secure than the others, for the greater number is the stronger, and also men are more content when they have an equal amount, whereas the owners of wealthy properties, if the regime gives them the superior position, seek to behave insolently and to gain by it.^{xix} (1307a5-21)

LS: This is one of the important passages which makes clear what one can call Aristotle's second approach to the question of the arising regimes. The first is the one in book 3, which we had discussed before. There is a variety of regimes which can be enumerated exhaustively, if you consider both the number of rulers and goodness or badness. Then you get six regimes. What he says here, "constitutional government," should be translated by "polity." The polity is the regime in which citizenship is open to all who are able to supply themselves with heavy armor, and that means fairly small but not altogether negligible property qualifications.

The second approach, which is more "realistic," more practical, is the one which starts from the two alternatives obviously open to the cities: democracy and oligarchy, the rule of the poor, the rule of the rich. Now rule of the poor does not of course mean that the rich have nothing whatever, that the rich are deprived of their citizen rights, but they have no decisive say because they will always be outvoted. In the opposite case, when the rich take over, then they will deprive the people of their

^{xvi} Throughout this passage the reader says "polity" where the Rackham translation has "constitutional government," with one exception.

^{xvii} Throughout this passage the reader says "regime" where the Rackham translation has "constitution," with one exception.

^{xviii} Rackham has "multitude."

^{xix} Rackham has "gain money."

full citizen rights by abolishing popular assembly or the law courts. It is quite interesting, perhaps a democracy in olden times, which did not, except in a few cases where [. . .] was quite violent, ⁸[harm] the rich except by making them subject to the popular view and not take away their property. The reason was that the *dēmos*, the common people, were of course themselves property owners and therefore tried to keep the titles to property intact.

Now to come back to the point we are trying to make, we have here democracy and oligarchy as the normal possibilities, and then we see in the defective character of the two a blend or a mean. The first, the lower one, is the polity, the rule of hoplites; and the higher ones are what Aristotle calls here the so-called aristocracies, meaning regimes which consider not only free birth plus wealth but also merit or reputed merit. That is very hard to say, where to draw the line, because the virtue of which people generally speak is not virtue in the strict sense of Aristotle's *Ethics*. That would be an aristocracy in the strictest sense, for which we would not find many empirical examples. So this passage makes that quite clear, the relation of these four republican regimes, and the subconditions that follow as a matter of course. There are various kinds of democracies, various kinds of oligarchies, a subject which will be taken up again in book 6.

Is there any other point in today's assignment which anyone would like to take up? Because we have no particular interest in the historical examples.

Student: Starting from the second way of classifying regimes, starting with the conflict between the rule of the rich and the rule of the poor out of which you give the two blends, how would one arrive at kingship or tyranny?

LS: Kingship would be an extreme possibility which could arise both from oligarchy—that the oligarchs feel unable to resist the attack by the many unless they concentrate power in several hands, or maybe, as Aristotle said in a passage we read before, that the common people, oppressed by the rich, find a leader who becomes a tyrant, like [. . .] in Athens. That could emerge from both.

Same Student: I think the reason I asked that question was that the first classification seems much more schematic, and we would say analytical than the second.

LS: Yes, it seems to be exhaustive.

Same Student: And I wonder whether that distinction is not somehow relevant to the greater difficulty of deriving kingship and tyranny from this common, ordinary—

LS: You see from this that a theoretically more attractive scheme may be less valuable, not only for practice but also for [. . .] of understanding. But what is the specific reason why it is easy to supplement the scheme in the direction of tyranny, as I just did, and not regarding kingship? Aristotle had given that reason. Kingship may be a republican institution, as it was in Sparta, and then it is not characteristic of the regime. It would mean simply lifelong generalship or lifelong priesthood—that is of no political interest. But if it is taken in a more serious sense, then it belongs to the olden times, to the times when political life was not yet fully developed; and therefore that is now, meaning in Aristotle's "now," no longer a serious possibility. He had a [. . .] a king's son who became a king, as

you know, but this was for Aristotle not interesting. For which reason was this not interesting, what Alexander did, and this kingship?

Student: Even though there seem to be several possibilities in the couple sentences where he said virtue and bias are the chief causes of dissension in regime, or that the difference between the wealthy and the poor . . .

LS: It is a more deep-seated cause. For example, take wealth and poverty, which are also very important as Aristotle says in the same context. The change from wealth to poverty and poverty to wealth is not as deep as the change from virtue to [vice]. But what about the question of Alexander, of kingship?

Student: Could it be that Alexander was from a semi-barbaric family?

LS: That is one way to put it. Mixed barbarism, but more simply . . .

Student: He created one vast hodge-podge which hardly produced a city in which candidates for office were known to someone so that they could be judged rationally.

LS: Still short. It was not a *polis*, it was a kind of empire. That was from Aristotle's point of view inferior to a *polis*. You must not take this point of Aristotle so lightly.

For Aristotle there are as it were three alternatives which are prior to his *Politics*, therefore not schematically discussed, and they come up only occasionally. One we can call a tribe, and the other let us call an empire, for convenience; in between is the *polis*. What is characteristic of an empire, be it that of Persia or of Alexander the Great and his successors? It is that there is no freedom. On the other hand, it may very well be quite civilized: there may be a high development of the arts, even of the theoretical arts. The opposite pole is the tribe, in which you have freedom, a kind of barbaric freedom. Think of an Indian tribe. But there is no high development of the arts, no civilization. The *polis* is superior to the two extremes because it is capable of both things, freedom and civilization, at the same time. This was, in a way, the view which was not peculiar to Aristotle, but I think shared by most Greeks of his time and succeeding generations. For example, you find the phrase more than once [. . .] the cities and the nations, nations in the sense of tribes, which implies the nations, the barbarians. They do not live politically; they do not live in *poleis*. They live in villages or in any other way.

The *polis* has this great superiority. It has one great defect, obviously, from its own point of view, and that is that it is militarily inferior to an empire. And it was a fantastic achievement that the Greeks won these three battles against the Persians; and at the end of the Peloponnesian War this great adventure had already been lost. The enormous wealth of the Persian Empire and the ability to have professional soldiers as distinguished from the citizen-soldiery remaining in the Greek cities made it a very great danger which was overcome only through the victories of Alexander the Great, which took care of the danger of foreign domination but destroyed of course at the same time the possibility of political freedom. The same was repeated a couple of centuries⁹ [after], when Rome, still a republic, defeated the successor monarchies, and yet Rome became a

monarchy about a century afterward. Then freedom, republican life, disappeared for a very long time from almost the whole world, with a few exceptions in Italy and Germany. The republics became possible again, and people began to play with the thought of republics; and this is a modern phenomenon beginning in a way with Machiavelli, and then in England [with] people like Milton.

But the great objection still remained: How can you have freedom and yet on a large territory? Incidentally, Thomas More's *Utopia* is a document which should be considered in this context. More's *Utopia* is of course a very playful book, but it has also a great underlying seriousness. This utopia is England; the description of the utopia corresponds to that of England, and the capital, I forget how he calls it, is obviously nonsense.^{xx} It is a republic, and that is not seen by most readers of the *Utopia* because Thomas More seems to put the emphasis on communism. That is for him indeed only play. He doesn't believe in the possibility of communism, but the real change which he effects in his imagination is from Henry VIII or any other monarchy of this kind to a republic. This republic is possible, because what you have in *Utopia* is an alliance of *poleis*. In a way, it is the same thing used explicitly by Montesquieu in the *Spirit of Laws* and [. . .] Aristotle's point is that he could not consider the possibility of a large-scale republic, but the proof of the possibility of such republic was not given before the middle of the nineteenth century. Therefore, if that was an error of Aristotle, or a narrowness, it is quite excusable. Now what was your other point?

Same Student: In 1303b13, it is true that wealth and poverty may be less deep-seated than virtue and vice, but it seems to me that the things which would go lower down, like for instance racial differences, would be more difficult to change than virtue and vice.

LS: If you take virtue and vice seriously, it is true. If you understand virtue and vice in a crude sense, then you are right. But in the strict sense, is this not deeper than racial differences?

If [there are] two virtuous men of different races, do they not understand each other in the decisive respect better than they understand one another [. . .]^{xxi}

Same Student: In 1303b13, he talks about what types of things cause dissension, and it is not clear to me why the greatest dissension is that caused by virtue and vice.

LS: A rich crook and a poor crook: Cannot they understand each other very well? Therefore the difference between wealth and poverty can be bridged very easily, provided they are both virtuous or vicious. But not in the other case; there is no understanding possible between the virtuous and the vicious man if we take the words seriously.

Same Student: But most revolutions are not caused, or civil strife . . .

LS: That is the point, but Aristotle is here rather obstinate. He knows quite well that it is easy to reject this remark as far-fetched and impractical, but he says if you disregard this point, you get a wholly wrong picture of the possibilities of man and of his political life. This is shown

^{xx} The capital city is Amaurot.

^{xxi} Strauss presumably said something like "in less important matters."

by the fact that even those saying, “Well, forget about such fancy things like virtue and speak about interests and serious matters [. . .]” is a good example in our time, the holy or unholy trinity which moves political life according to Lasswell,^{xxii} and yet another enumeration which he makes—he uses also a word called integrity, so at least the appearance of honesty is politically very important. Think only of the difficulty which Mr. Nixon still has because people think he’s [tricky]. In one way or another, virtue comes in nevertheless. We must trust, and that presupposes trustworthiness. People can be mistaken, and all forms of cynicism are justified; but it is still there as a demand and as a need, and Aristotle takes this very seriously although he knows that in many cases you can and people do with the spurious forms of these things, and they don’t insist on the general [. . .] But it is demanded somehow by the situation. That is the difference between Aristotle and the modern thinkers.

^{xxii} Harold D. Lasswell, prominent political scientist and author of *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1936).

Session 12: November 15, 1967
Book 5, chapters 3–12

Leo Strauss: The general survey which you gave showed again, if it needed any further showing, the empirical character of Aristotle's study.ⁱ When he tries to show how tyrannies are preserved and how they are destroyed, he draws on the experience enumerated throughout the ages, at least in Greece. What gives Aristotle's statements the appearance of being "ideological" is the mere fact that his biases differ from our biases. For example, we would not so unhesitatingly say, as he said, that the king takes the side of the notables, of the gentlemen, and this is already a proof of tyranny if the monarch takes the side of the common people. We have a democratic bias. Aristotle had an aristocratic bias. Which bias is ultimately the wiser? That would be the question. But this is only in passing.

The main point, and what was most interesting, was what you said at the beginning about the general character of Aristotle's doctrine of revolution, and you referred there to the fact—true or feign, as Hobbes would say—that the Greeks had a cyclical view of history, as distinguished from the linear view due to the Bible, perhaps, and prevailing in modern times. That is in a rough sense true, but it is nevertheless misleading. In order to make the first step toward clarity, one should say there is no Greek view of history. There is no [such] thing as Plato's or Aristotle's or Lucretius's or any philosopher of history, for the very simple reason that there is no word for history in this sense. The Greeks had, of course, the word history: it is of Greek origin, and in simple transcription, *historia*. Now that means inquiry, nothing else. Of course that means more inquiry into natural things than into strange things—birds, fish, and so on—than into the deeds of men. In older books you will still find the expression "natural history," the description of animals and plants as distinguished from political history, ecclesiastical history, and so on. So it means inquiry, and it apparently took on rather early the meaning "inquiry," meaning inquiry with other human beings. If you want to find out about a bird, you do not necessarily have to inquire with other people; you go to the region where the bird is and you look at it in its way of life. But if you are interested in what happened before your time, that you can find only by inquiring with other human beings, either living or dead. It makes a difference to these individuals, sure, but not to me or you. This man who tells you something about the First World War, alive or dead, is uninteresting.

Therefore *historia* means inquiry, and writing down the results of inquiry. It never means the object of that inquiry. Now this is precisely the meaning which history has taken on in modern times. In English it is impossible to bring out the difference. In German it is much easier. The Germans may distinguish between *Historie*, history, and *Geschichte*. In English, let us make a tentative distinction between subjective history and objective history. History in the objective sense as a field, as a dimension of reality, that did not exist, and that came into being only in modern times. Some people say that while the Greeks did not have a notion of history simply speaking, this notion of history is biblical, of Old Testament origin, which is also quite wrong. There is the Hebrew word for history, *hiys'tor'yah*, which means it is derived from the Greek word. There is no biblical word for history.

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

Now what is the purpose of these reflections, of these antiquarian notations? It is of great importance because history is one of these many terms without which we cannot talk, and yet the meaning of which is quite obscure. It is a product of a process that has taken place in a completely unsupervised manner, and we are the result of that process. It is mere opinion—our use of that term and all the theories based on this term all the more. So we have to consider, take seriously, make conscious what is only in itself a mere inheritance which we do not understand. For example, if one takes a man who is at first glance closest in the classical period to modern ways of thinking, Thucydides, there is no possibility to speak here of history as an object. Thucydides is concerned with war. Now war is a very unproblematic concept because everyone can point to it: if you look at a fight of two boys, you have a good image of a war—or for that matter, competition between two girls. You don't have to go very far, but this is an unproblematic concept, as unproblematic as a table. History is something entirely different. The fundamental distinction which has underlaid Thucydides and Greek thought in general is that between nature and convention, and that has become replaced in modern times by the distinction between nature and history, especially in the modern idealistic tradition.¹ What was called originally convention is now called historical in modern times. That is one of the greatest changes in human thought which has taken place, and even if we made the greatest effort we cannot exhaust the importance of that change.

Someone asked me what is the relation between the Aristotelian concept of regime, *politeia*, and Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit*. Hegel makes the distinction between morality and *Sittlichkeit*—which could be synonymous in German, but Hegel makes the distinction because he thinks that the distinction is important. Very roughly, morality is the conscience of the individual, the mere conscience; the *Sittlichkeit* is the morality embodied in the institutions and in the life of the people. That is the substantive morality as distinguished from the mere conscience. There is some connection between the two things, that is clear. There is also a very profound difference, and that has very much to do with the fact that Hegel's political philosophy is in a way the same as his philosophy of history. In Aristotle, there is no philosophy of history.

The meaning of philosophy of history in Hegel is this. There is necessarily an ultimate coincidence between the ought and the is, between the ideal and the real. For Aristotle there is no such necessity whatever. The famous words of Hegel in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*, surely known to some of you: "what is reasonable is actual and what is actual is reasonable."ⁱⁱ Strictly speaking, this is true only of the final state, where there is a complete coincidence. This is completely absent from Aristotle's thought. Since Aristotle was read throughout the nineteenth century in the light of Hegel, Aristotle was viewed as a kind of ancient Hegel, a Greek Hegel opposing the Greek Kant, i.e., Plato. Just as in Plato you have this radical distinction between the ideas and the sensible things, you have a contradistinction between the ought and the is, the radical distinction; therefore Aristotle was understood to be a realist,² a man who denies the ultimate significance of the cleavage between the is and the ought. That is wrong. We have seen, and we will see more clearly when we come to books 7 and 8, that the Aristotelian best regime is as "unreal" as Plato's

ⁱⁱ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10.

best regime. There is no intrinsic necessity of its ever becoming actual. We must keep this in mind.

When Hegel quotes in some of his earlier writings, he quotes passages from Plato and Aristotle and translates them into German. When the word *polis* occurs, he translates it by the German word *Volk*, which in German is ambiguous, meaning both *ethnos*, the nation, and *dēmos*, the populace. The question of the regime is no longer a question for Hegel, because this final regime necessarily becomes actual, and all other regimes are either obsolete, or bad, inadequate. And this [final] regime is generally known by the name of constitutional monarchy, but with a very un-Belgian emphasis on the royal power. You know what I mean by Belgian, Belgium being the modern constitutional monarchy in the nineteenth century.

About the notion of *politeia* of Aristotle and the Marxian notion of the modes of production—especially since Aristotle admits as a matter of course that the regimes depend at least to some extent on certain so-called economic conditions, for example, the best kind of democracy is an agricultural democracy, and here we see that the modes of production are very important—surely there is here a partial agreement. The agreement between Aristotle and Marx, the important one, is however not on this point but [rather] Marx’s distinction between use-value and exchange-value, which starts at the same point where Aristotle stops [but] it goes off in a very different direction. Now what can I give to you as a simple example to make clear to you the difference? There are no modes of production in Aristotle. For Marx, it goes without saying that hunting and fishing are modes of production. For Aristotle these are not modes of production, because you do not produce the deer and the fish. Hunting or catching is not producing. Even agriculture, strictly speaking, is not producing because most of the producing is done by the earth and the weather. Strict producing is done by the artisans. A table, that could never come into being without human production.

Now what is behind that? It is not merely a verbal difference but one of the utmost importance. We have mentioned this before, but I think I should repeat that. How come all gaining of livelihood is called production from a certain moment on—not in Hegel, only earlier, say, roughly since the eighteenth century. How come? Answer: Because nature is supposed to supply nothing except the “almost worthless materials.” Do you recognize this quotation? Locke.ⁱⁱⁱ That is the key change. Locke is not the first one, but Locke is a very important man in this change. So if nature supplies³ so to speak nothing, then everything of worth or value which we have is the work of man, of human production, and that is the reason why there cannot be modes of production in this simple way.

Aristotle gives a question of some interest: To what extent is [was what is] now called, or especially since Marx [has been called], capitalist production⁴ already in a germinal way present in such a big commercial industrial center like Athens? And so that is of some subordinate interest. But for Aristotle himself, in this respect he was a reactionary and he looked back to this predominantly agricultural life. Again, it is easy to say why he was a

ⁱⁱⁱ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chap. 5, sec. 43.

reactionary, because the great capitalist order is [not] unqualifiedly superior to the agricultural time of the past. And that leads into very deep waters, and only men of great levity would decide this without having made a sufficiently profound study, as you would admit, I hope. I shouldn't have said "I hope," because that is manipulating.

One more point: "Since he believes that aristocracies suffer primarily from a defective combination of these essential elements, it seems that Aristotle believes that virtue alone is insufficient for the proper maintenance of a *polis*."^{iv} That is a gross understatement. Of course virtue is not sufficient. If they didn't have food, how could there be a *polis*? To quote a joke that Xenophon occasionally makes—that was in Asia Minor, after the battle of [Cunaxa] where the Greeks under [Clearchus] had been defeated, and the Persian king wants the Greeks to hand over their weapons—and then Xenophon says that without the weapons, our virtue is of no value to us.^v The virtue would be wholly ineffective without that equipment, as Aristotle calls it.

There is one point in last week's reading which we do not have to read now, 1301b29 following, in which he speaks of proportionate equality in contradistinction to arithmetic equality. This calls for a brief comment. Proportionate equality means the equality in which a proportion is embodied, whereas in an arithmetic equality there is no proportion. It means, in practical terms, to everyone according to his deserts, whereas the arithmetic equality means to everyone the same as to everybody else. To everyone according to his deserts reminds us of the Marxist formula, to everyone according to his needs. Surely Aristotle means the opposite of what Marx meant, but what is the reason behind that difference? What induces Marx or his followers or friends to say: To everyone according to his needs? One could say, in the first place—disregarding the entirely present equality of Marxism—compassion: compassion with the underdog, special obligation to the underprivileged, for their sufferings or deprivations are due to the injustice or society, "of the power structure" or, in Aristotle's language, of the regime. Therefore it is the primary duty to take care of those who suffer from the injustice of the regime. Clearly here in this Marxist understanding it doesn't mean the regime now prevailing, because injustices go back to earlier regimes as well. So⁵ the injustices from all regimes—or the final order will be without a regime; [it] will be a classless society and not a state.

Aristotle's reasoning is entirely different, of course. Not all sufferings come from society, and therefore society has no obligation, as it were, to punish itself for them. Many come from nature: man is a mortal being; there is scarcity of things; quite a few men have a natural defect regarding goodness of body and soul. There are then very good reasons why should there be this radical difference between Aristotle and Marx. Of course, in all these cases, I repeat, it is necessary to understand the issue, the controversial issue, and to understand it as fully as one can in order then to try to decide it for oneself. But one cannot do that without knowing the issue.

^{iv} Strauss evidently reads from the student paper presented at the beginning of the session.

^v This joke appears in Xenophon's *The Anabasis of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), just after Clearchus's defeat of the XXX in the Battle of Cunaxa, in 401 B. C., XX, 75 [2.1.XX–12].

Now we come to our assignment, 1307b26. Yes?

Student: Are these concepts comparable to what later writers have used as commutative and distributive justice?

LS: This distinction is Aristotle's, and they do overlap; they are not identical. Commutative justice is the one in which arithmetic equality is the only just consideration. Distributive justice is the one in which only proportional justice is the just consideration.

Student: In my readings, in people like Henry [. . .] or Hayek,^{vi} could it not be the other way around? [. . .] talks about commutative justice as getting what they are due with their given resources and distributive justice is diminishing equality among resources . . .

LS: I knew Mr. Hayek when he was here, but I do not know his doctrine. At any rate, in Aristotle commutative justice is the one applying in exchange. The worth of what a shoemaker does for you—the shoe produced by him, the leather and such and such a quality—and what you give him in payment should be identical. But Aristotle extends it. Aristotle says the same is also true regarding punitive justice. To take a crude, pre-Aristotelian case: an eye for an eye. Now Aristotle does not mean it in this literal sense, of course, but the main point is this, that thing which commutative and distributive justice have in common: in both cases, the human being, what we call the person, has not to be considered. If a rich man committed murder, the fact that he is a rich man is in itself irrelevant. The fact which is important is that he committed the murder. Similarly, in an exchange over the counter it is uninteresting whether the buyer is rich or poor. There should be such proportion between the value of the product and the price. But distributive justice is the one in which the persons are to be considered, namely, are they worthy or unworthy? Therefore, arithmetic equality or proportionate equality. That is the Aristotelian distinction.

Now Aristotle begins here in the present assignment with a number of general considerations regarding the preservations of regimes. The general principle is that if we know through what kinds of things regimes are destroyed, we know also those things through which they are preserved. The next point which he makes in 40, 1307b40: one must not trust those things which have been laid down . . .

Reader:

The next point is that we must not put faith in the argument put together for the sake of tricking the many,^{vii} for they are refuted by the facts—

^{vi} Friedrich Hayek was an Austrian economist and a professor at the University of Chicago from 1950 to 1962. "Henry" may refer to Henry George (1839–1897), author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879).

^{vii} Rackham has "strung together for the sake of tricking the multitude."

LS: In Lincoln's famous saying, "for some of the people some of the time,"^{viii} and people know quite well if they have been disfranchised although they have the right to vote. Not a profound mind is needed in order to see the difference between actual voting power and merely legal voting power, and similar things. Aristotle gives then a number of other similar principles, for example, in 1308a25.

Reader:

And regimes are kept secure not only from being at a distance from destroyers but sometimes also through being near them, for when they are afraid the citizens keep a closer hold on the government; hence those who take thought for the regime must contrive causes of fear, in order that the citizens may keep guard and not relax their vigilance for the regime like a watch in the night, and they must make the distant near. (1308a25-30)

LS: If people under a given regime are so sure of the perpetuity of the regime, that is one great reason for fearing the future of that regime. Vigilance is the price of liberty, to use another formula to the same intent. Let us turn to 1308b10.

Reader:⁶

and in the other case, polity turns into a democracy . . . But it is a policy common to democracy and oligarchy and to monarchy, and to every regime^{ix} not to raise up any man too much beyond due proportion, but rather to try to assign small honors and of long tenure or great ones quickly (for officials grow corrupt, and not every man can bear good fortune), or if not, at all events not to bestow honors in clusters and take them away again in clusters, but by a gradual process; and best of all to try so to regulate people by the law that there may be nobody among them specially preeminent in power due to friends or wealth, or, failing this, to cause their periods out of office to be spent abroad. (1308b10-19)

LS: In other words, in a polite way ostracism is a perfectly inevitable means of preservation of regimes.

Another point which has been raised before: Aristotle is not in favor of unqualified property rights. It is necessary for a regime in order to preserve itself that there should be ceilings, because otherwise inequality might become too great for a democracy and even for an oligarchy.

This point to which Aristotle referred earlier and which he did not explain is touched upon, namely, why as a rule there is in a democracy no cleavage within the *dēmos*, why there is as a rule one within the oligarchs—that is discussed in b31.

Reader:

In every form of regime it is a very great thing for it to be so framed both by its laws and

^{viii} The famous saying attributed to Lincoln is, in full, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

^{ix} Rackham has "form of constitution."

by its other institutions that it is impossible for the magistracies to make a profit.

LS: Namely, profit through the magistracies. Conflict of interest.

Reader:

And this has most to be guarded against in oligarchies; for the many are not so much annoyed at being excluded from holding office (but in fact they are glad that someone lets them have leisure to spend on their own affairs) as they are if they think that the magistrates are stealing the common funds, but then both things annoy them, exclusion from the honors of office and exclusion from its profits. And indeed the sole way in which a combination of democracy and aristocracy is possible is if someone could contrive this arrangement; for it would then be possible for the notables and also the multitude both to have what they want; for it is the democratic principle for all to have the right to hold office and the aristocratic one for the offices to be filled by the notables, and this will be the case when it is impossible to make money from the office; for the poor will not want to hold office because of making nothing out of it, but rather to attend to their own affairs, while the wealthy will be able to hold office since they have no need to add to their resources from the public funds. (1308b31-1309a7)

LS: That answers this question. The common people have an interest not to be cheated and to have the prospect of prosperity, and this end they will all have in common; but regarding the oligarchs, there is of course a competition for office and for honor and therefore the cleavage of which Aristotle speaks.

Student: Aristotle seems to use here aristocracy and oligarchy as the same.

LS: He speaks of aristocracy in a more ordinary sense, whereas aristocracy in the stricter sense we would find in books 7 and 8. That is another matter, and there they would be well bred and fine, but an ordinary aristocracy is a regime in which the chief title to ruling office is merit, which means people are elected to office on the ground of merit or are supposed to be elected on merit as distinguished from mere free birth or mere wealth.

Student: Isn't it true, though, that given a sufficient level of prosperity the *dēmos* will also enter the same competition?

LS: That Aristotle discusses. For example, there might be, so to speak, the case where they all would become wealthy. Then you would have to do something—and he discusses this later: then you would have to draw the line between those fully qualified for office on account of property, and those who are [. . .] differently, say, no longer an income of a thousand dollars but of fifty thousand in the case of conservative inflation.

Same Student: That wouldn't really solve the problem that is discussed here.

LS: But assuming now that the mass of the people have to work very hard to earn a living, then they have an interest in not being cheated of what they earn, but they are

satisfied if they have the opportunity to earn. That is what Aristotle means.

Same Student: But it seems to presuppose that the desire for honor of this kind, a desire for distinction, is by nature limited.

LS: That is a crude rule of the thumb statement. Aristotle would know that there are sometimes people who are poor who are very ambitious, but still it is a question to what extent can their ambition, the ambition of a poor man, become politically effective. I have heard and read quite a bit about the minimum income which a United States Senator must have in order to win an election. We have heard the case of Mr. Dodd, the Senator from Connecticut;^x that was a famous case, and other cases too. For example, a man like [. . .] this abominable demagogue according to the presentation by [. . .] was of course a relatively wealthy man, surely much wealthier than [. . .] only because he acquired his wealth by ill-smelling methods, meaning he was a [. . .] or high stealer; and therefore he was looked down on by the gentlemen, as you can imagine. But that doesn't mean he was a poor man. So generally speaking what Aristotle has in mind apart from extreme cases like philosophers, which one can safely disregard, [is that] people must have a certain amount of wealth if they want to become political leaders. That for Aristotle is presupposed. There are some famous examples to the contrary; think of the famous [Third Servile] War^{xi} under Spartacus and Rome, but this was a special case. These were people who had become prisoners of war and were probably quite independent economically before having been made prisoners, and then the intolerable life they led as gladiators led them to make this revolt. But that is a special case; that is not normal political life. But normally, you need some considerable wealth. The only way to avoid it, as Aristotle indicated, would be to have pay for political service. But they never paid the magistrates; the only thing which they did was to pay for their presence at the assembly or the law courts, and this was really very⁷ [little], as one can see from the comedies—like a⁸ [dollar], not much more.

Student: I have a question about Aristotle's general procedure in this book. He starts from his versions of the causes of revolution and then moves to questions of means by which regimes may be preserved, on the grounds that to know the cause of revolution is to know the grounds of their preservation. I am struck by the fact that much of modern social science proceeds on entirely different grounds; that is, it proceeds from some notion of functional prerequisites of order, of stability, and then from these generalizations usually considers the problem of disorder. I don't know if this is at all significant. What I would like to know is whether Aristotle's procedure is simply a matter of convenience, or whether you think he might have simply reversed the procedure, or whether there is something significant in his method which distinguishes it from social science.

LS: There is probably an important difference, but the point which was⁹ [primary] for Aristotle was indicated by him. If you know that which destroys a thing, you know also what preserves it, namely, the opposite of what destroys it.

^x Thomas J. Dodd, U.S. Senator from Connecticut, 1954–1970, was censured in 1967 by the Senate for converting campaign funds to his personal accounts.

^{xi} Rackham has “war.” Spartacus's slave rebellion and subsequent war took place 73–71 BCE.

Same Student: But my point is that much of what I have read in the treatment of revolutions or theories of social systems in modern social science say [that] once we know what the requisites for order are, what would be the logical necessities for a regime to maintain itself, then we can proceed to discuss what the causes of disorder are.

LS: But there is one obvious difference between this kind of question and the Aristotelian question, namely, the modern political character of the modern social sciences. You have stated it: order. Aristotle is concerned with specific order: what preserves or destroys democracies, oligarchies, tyrannies. They are very different things. There is no homogeneous notion of order regardless of the regime. That is a point on which I have touched [on] more than once. Now let us turn to 1309a33.

Reader:

There are some three qualities which those who are to hold the supreme magistracies ought to possess, first, loyalty to the established regime, next, very great capacity to do the duties of the office, and third, virtue and justice—in each regime the sort of justice suited to the regime (for if the rules of justice are not the same under all regimes, it follows that there must be differences in the nature of justice also). (1309a33-37)

LS: Now this is relativism. What is the difference between this statement of Aristotle's and a truly relativistic position? I trust you understood the main point of this. People who are to be promoted or elected into the decisive offices must have, [first], affection for the established regime; second, they must have the greatest possible power for the work to be done by that office; and third, virtue and justice in each regime, virtue and justice relative to the regime. In other words, there is a democratic virtue, an oligarchic virtue, a monarchic, and so on. Now what is the difference between that, as Aristotle means it, and a relativistic view?

Student: A relativistic modern view might tend to say that we can't determine which of these views of virtue is superior.

LS: Yes. Aristotle's view of this variety of notions of justice and virtue points eventually to one authoritative meaning.

Reader:

It is a difficult question how the choice ought to be made when it happens that all these qualities are not found in the same person; for instance, if one man is a good military commander but a bad man and no friend of the regime, and the other is just and loyal, how should the choice be made? It seems that two things ought to be considered, what is the quality of which all men have a larger share, and what is the one of which all men have a smaller share? Therefore in the case of military command one must consider experience more than virtue, for men have a smaller share of military experience and a larger share of moral goodness; but in the case of a trusteeship or a stewardship the opposite, for these require more virtue than most men possess, but the knowledge required is common to all

men. (1309a37-b7)

LS: So in other words, in the case of a general, even if you know he is a dirty fascist and he's hard, but he is a first-rate general, you make him general. There is some contemporary evidence for this line of reasoning. But in another case, for example, the case of a treasurer: in olden times, when there was not a very complicated system of finance, he doesn't need great expertise because counting a couple of thousand dollars is an easy matter. But he must be honest. Here honesty is the thing to be considered. Now read the sequel.

Reader:

And somebody might raise the question, why is virtue needed if both capacity and loyalty to the regime are forthcoming, as even these two qualities will do what is suitable? May not the answer be, because those who possess these two qualities may possibly lack self-control, so that just as they do not serve themselves well although they know how to and although they love themselves, so possibly in some cases they may behave in this way in regard to the city also? (1309b7-13)

LS: Of what kind of cases does he think here?

Student: George Brown, the foreign secretary of England^{xii} who keeps getting . . .

LS: He drinks so much?

Same Student: This is one of . . .

LS: Scandal, decisively. Good. Now a key point, which he regards as the most important of everything said, is in 1310a12.

Reader:

But the most important of all the means spoken of to secure the stability of regimes is one that at present all people despise: It is a system of education suited to the regimes.

LS: There is of course no word "system" in Aristotle here, but being educated with a view to the regime.

Reader:

For there is no use in the most valuable laws, ratified by the unanimous judgment of the whole body of citizens, if these are not trained and educated in the regime, popularly if the laws be popular, oligarchically if they be oligarchical; for there is such a thing as want of self-discipline in a city, as well as in an individual. But to have been educated to suit the regime does not mean to do the things that give pleasure to the adherents of oligarchy or to the supporters of democracy, but the things that will enable the former to govern oligarchically and the latter to govern themselves democratically. (1310a12-23)

^{xii} George Alfred Brown, later Baron George-Brown (1914–1985).

LS: So in other words, not the pleasing but the useful.

Reader:

But at present in the oligarchies the sons of the rulers are luxurious, and the sons of the badly-off become trained by exercise and labor, so that they are more both desirous of reform and more able to bring it about; while in the democracies thought to be the most democratic the opposite of what is expedient has come about. And the cause of this is that they define liberty wrongly (for there are two things that are thought to be defining features of democracy, the sovereignty of the majority and liberty); for justice is supposed to be equality, and equality the sovereignty of whatever may have been decided by the many,^{xiii} and liberty doing just what one likes. Hence in democracies of this sort everybody lives as he likes, and “unto what end he listeth,” as Euripides says. That is bad; for to live in conformity with the regime ought not to be considered slavery but safety. (1310a23-35)

LS: Democracy then is in a way the most permissive regime, as Aristotle indicates here and will state more fully in book 6, but there are necessary limits to the permissiveness of democracy because otherwise it will perish. If it is permissive to everything undemocratic, then its end will be close. That he regards as the most important consideration: education. But obviously education does not mean here what it means ordinarily today—meaning a training in skills or something of this kind—but formation of character, but in the specific political sense: that kind of a measure of character which is in agreement, in correspondence with the regime, [namely], democratic in democracies, and oligarchic in oligarchies. Now can you read the immediate sequel?

Reader:

This therefore, speaking broadly, is a list of the things that cause the alteration and destruction of regimes, and of those that cause their security and continuance. (1310a36-38)

LS: Now here that is truly wrongly translated by Barker.^{xiv} It has been stated how *politeia* in Greek [should be translated as “regime”], but here *politeia* obviously means something distinguished from monarchy; and the only way in which we can bring that out is to speak of republics, and we must keep this in mind. *Politeia* has a variety of meanings. If we limit ourselves only to that family connected with the regime: (a) regime in general; (b) republic; and (c) that particular regime called polity. But the distinction between republic and monarchy is of course very important and has played a great role in the history of the West, to the extent to which that history was a fight between monarchism and republicanism, as in England in the seventeenth century and on the continent of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth. There are quite a few other passages later on in which *politeia* has this meaning of republic.

He turns now to tyrannies in the immediate sequel. The passage which I have in mind and that I describe to you is what I call Aristotle’s second scheme for understanding and

^{xiii} Rackham has “multitude.”

^{xiv} The reader is reading from Rackham’s translation, not Barker’s.

analyzing the various kinds of regimes. The first, you remember the six [. . .] the good ones and the bad ones [. . .] and the other one which starts from democracy and oligarchy, the most obvious and potent forms of regimes, and understanding all other regimes by starting from the antagonism between democracy and oligarchy [. . .]^{xv}

Now let us turn to 1310b35. He gives here a survey of tyrants, and quite occasionally he mentions here that all of these have been benefited . . .

Reader:

For in every instance this honor fell to men after they had conferred benefit or because they had the ability to confer benefit on their cities or their nations.

LS: The cities or the nations: these are the fundamental alternatives. I referred to this last time. Now 1312a39.

Reader:

And one way in which tyranny is destroyed, as is each of the other forms of regimes also, is from without, if some city with an opposite regime is stronger (for the wish to destroy it will clearly be present in such a neighbor because of the opposition of principle— (1312a39-1312b2)

LS: That corresponds roughly to what we mean by the Greek word,^{xvi} the opposite of preference, choice: that which, say, the democrats prefer, the fundamental preference, differs from the fundamental preference of the tyrant. Therefore the democracies, other things being equal, will try to destroy the tyrants; and even oligarchies will try to do that, and vice versa. So each kind has its imperialism: to make all other regimes equal to itself and make the world safe for democracy, tyranny, or whatever. Naturally, in all such rules this is to be qualified. There was the famous case of Bismarck, who was, as you can imagine, a very strong monarchist but wanted France to be a republic.

Then we turn to kingship in 1313a25, where Aristotle says in passing—

Reader:

Royal governments do not occur anymore in Athens,^{xvii} but if ever monarchies do occur they are rather tyrannies.

LS: A great change has occurred, a change according to which monarchies no longer come into being [. . .]^{xviii} That has of course an interesting consequence. If kingship is the best regime, as Aristotle says both here and in the *Ethics*, that means that the best regime is

^{xv} The transcriber notes that “the tape is quite inaudible at this point.” The transcriber does not indicate the length of the inaudible portion.

^{xvi} It is possible that there is something missing here.

^{xvii} The reader adds “in Athens” where the Rackham translation has “now.”

^{xviii} The transcriber notes that the tape is inaudible at this point. The duration of the inaudible portion is not noted.

impossible in the time in which, for example, rhetoric [arises],^{xix} but not only rhetoric but also philosophy, so that the peak of political excellence is located at a different point than intellectual excellence. This means, vulgarly stated, that you cannot eat your cake and have it. The two things are based on very different principles.

In the sequel here, in 1313a35 following, there is a long discussion of how to preserve tyrannies, and some people have drawn from this the conclusion that there is only a very minor difference between Aristotle's *Politics* and Machiavelli's *Prince*. What would you say to this assertion? Aristotle gives recipes for the preservation of tyranny. What is the difference?

Student: Many of his formulas for preserving tyrannies are things moderated to make it into a somewhat different form of government.

LS: Yes, and Machiavelli seems to give some recipes of a different description. When he takes, for example, this fellow used by Cesare Borgia—what was his name?—in order to get some order in the Romagna. After the Romagna was reduced to order through the terror exercised by this individual and he had fulfilled his function, one day people found that Himmler was cut into four pieces on the marketplace; and this increased their fear, and also at the same time produced some affection for [. . .]^{xx} Now Aristotle does not discuss that abominable thing.

We cannot read all this, but the main point however is this. Aristotle discusses the means for the preservation of tyranny, as he discusses the means for the preservation of all other regimes and he never leaves the slightest doubt as to the badness of tyranny; and then this point comes in, that tyranny can only be preserved by becoming closer to kingship—by becoming half-decent, as Aristotle calls it. Let us see, 1314b38, one device for improving tyranny.

Reader:

And further he must always be seen to be exceptionally zealous as regards religious observances—

LS: With a view to the gods.

Reader:

for people are less afraid of suffering any illegal treatment from men of this sort, if they think that their ruler has religious scruples and pays regard to the gods, and also they plot against him less, thinking that he has even the gods as allies—

LS: Because of his behavior.

^{xix} Strauss discusses the rise of rhetoric in session 11 on 1305a7–15.

^{xx} Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 29–30 (chap. 7). The name of the agent Borgia had cut in two was Remirro de Orco.

Reader:

though he should not display a foolish religiosity. (1314b38-1315a2)

LS: What was that story? It was a lady of easy manner who came into Athens on a chariot, looking like the goddess of Athena, which is one of these things a tyrant should not do. Now 1315a40.

Reader:

But to discuss each of such matters separately is superfluous; for the thing to aim at is clear, that it is necessary to appear to the subjects to be not a tyrannical ruler but a steward and a royal governor, and not an appropriator of wealth but a trustee, and to pursue the moderate things of life and not its extravagances, and also to make the notables one's comrades and the many one's followers. For the result of these methods must be that not only the tyrant's rule will be more honorable and more enviable because he will rule nobler subjects and not men that have been humiliated, and will not be continually hated and feared, but also that his rule will endure longer, and moreover that he himself in his personal character will be nobly disposed towards virtue, or at all events half-virtuous, and not base but only half-base. (1315a40-b10)

LS: That is the maximum which Aristotle is willing to grant, because the fundamental wishes would still be there, although driven underground; and therefore that is the great difference between Machiavelli, at least on the surface, and Aristotle.

Now a word about this last section, beginning in 1315b40, the discussion of Plato's *Republic* books 8 and 9, with which Aristotle is altogether displeased. Now we read perhaps only one passage which is particularly characteristic, 1316a25.

Reader:

Again as to tyranny he does not say whether it will undergo revolution or not, nor, if it will, what will be the cause of it, and into what sort of regime it will change; and the reason for this is that he could not have found it easy to say, for it is irregular; since according to him tyranny ought to change into the first and best regime, for so the process will be continuous in a circle, but as a matter of fact tyranny also changes into tyranny. (1316a25-30)

LS: That is the fundamental objection made by Aristotle to this part of the *Republic* altogether, that is indefinite, indeterminate—that any regime, so to speak, can change into any other regime. That is wholly indeterminate, and Plato seems to present the sequel in one way only: from aristocracy to what he calls timocracy; from timocracy to oligarchy; oligarchy to democracy; and democracy to tyranny. The last point is of course especially interesting. Does it stop when it has reached the bottom—tyranny—or does it not, by a kind of rejuvenation, almost miraculous rejuvenation, have a new kingship emerge out of the tyranny? The question is imposed by Plato but it is not answered there.

Student: As I remember Plato's discussion, he says that this isn't the way changes

actually take place, but this is a possibility. He gives you the models for change and shows the relation between people who have the character of a particular regime, how they might . . .

LS: I don't think Plato says what you say. The qualification which you say is perhaps implied in the fact that Plato presents the changes of regimes as strictly parallel to the changes in the characters of individuals. Plato gives a twofold account: the change, say, from oligarchy into democracy, and the change from the oligarchic man into a democratic man. In the second case, the change from the oligarchic man into the democratic man, it is the case of an oligarchic father, a man who has great self-control because he is a miser and greedy, and he brings it about that his son will be a spendthrift. He is the black sheep of the wealthy family. Whereas the political change is entirely different: in political change, the poor lean men oppose the rich and fat men, and make a successful rising and replace them and, after some killings and exiling, establish in this way a democracy. Whereas in the one scheme the typical democrat is the small farmer, hard-working man, in the other case the typical democrat is the good-for-nothing son of a wealthy father. So you can see here that there is some difficulty which one has to clear up if one wishes to understand what Aristotle says.

Same Student: It seems to me that Plato explains that these are not the ways things necessarily happen.

LS: You mean about the musical character of the whole thing, the poetic character of the whole presentation? Is that what you mean?

Same Student: He says here is how it might happen—

LS: Yes, that is indeed true, but still Plato can do such a thing, if only externally, and that Aristotle cannot do it is of some importance. In other words, Plato writes a dialogue, and Aristotle writes a kind of treatise heavy with factual material and solidly based on empirical evidence, which Plato does not do. This difference would still have to be accounted for.

Student: I'd like to know if Plato and Aristotle agree that when tyranny, when it changes, is more likely to change into an aristocratic form because it is more likely that the aristocratic men will be those who will revolt.

LS: Because they are more suppressed. But the point is this: that would mean that the tyrant, the man supported by the *demos*. But how come the bodyguard of the typical tyrant consists of foreigners, not of citizens, rich or poor, unless the *dēmos* is also dissatisfied?

Same Student: Oh, they would be dissatisfied, but the question is who would be more likely to incur the danger that would be implicit in trying to revolt against and overthrow a powerful tyrant. In other words, the aristocrats would be more willing to face death.

LS: What about Athens? Who made the rebellion against the Thirty Tyrants? The leaders of the *dēmos*.

Same Student: But with the Thirty Tyrants, it was more an oligarchy than a tyranny.

LS: But in Thebes it was also the *dēmos*. That is not necessarily true. I think Aristotle's point that all kinds of combinations are possible makes sense. We have heard more than once, today and last time, that Aristotle does not consider that kind of change which is now called a revolution, and where there is such a view that there is a one-way direction of the movement. Therefore some people deny that there can be a fascist revolution strictly understood because it is¹⁰ against the trend toward ever greater freedom and equality. Now we have seen that this is not as simple as that. Why is it undeniable that there are these secular tendencies, say, towards greater equality? That is not unknown to Aristotle, as is indicated by the fact that he says there are no longer kingships likely to arise. This is one fundamental change for good which can no longer be redressed until after a cataclysm. And then we begin from the beginning, which Aristotle does not mention here but which is implied.

Session 13: November 20, 1967
Book 6, entire

Leo Strauss: Obviously book 6, it appears from your paper,ⁱ deepens very much what we have heard before from Aristotle on democracy. I think you can say, with some exaggeration but with justified exaggeration, that it is the book on democracy, and in many respects democracy appears in a different light. One question: Why is Aristotle not a democrat? [. . .] Such a question could have arisen on the basis of book 3. I don't know if you remember that; that was a kind of running fight between the men of the people and men either in favor of aristocracy or [. . .] in book 3. Let us limit ourselves to book 6, where things become clearer. Why is Aristotle not a democrat [. . .]?

Student: The kind of democracy that Aristotle considers the best, agricultural democracy, is best largely because it approaches aristocracy. In other words, the rule will be by the notables, the best people.

LS: What is the difference between aristocracy and [agricultural] democracy? The same kind of people would rule. What is the difference?

Same Student: The farmers would call the rulers to account.

LS: And what is bad with that? One could say that it's good.

Same Student: In fact, Aristotle says that.

LS: Exactly. Power corrupts. But still, why does he not come out for democracy? The reason is this. It may seem farfetched but it is very important for Aristotle. It is not stated here, but [it is] that the higher in rank, in human worth, should have to give an account to the lower. There is something averse here; I think that is the reason both in Plato and Aristotle.

Although the most interesting part of the book without question is the section on democracy, but the book has also the other part mentioned by [. . .] and so the meaning of the book is not quite clear. Let us read the beginning to see what Aristotle himself says about it. The deliberative—or sovereign, if you want to translate it—the deliberative, just as in John Locke.

Reader:

[We have already discussed how many and what are the varieties of the deliberative body or sovereign power in the state,] and of the system of magistracies and of law courts, and which variety is adapted to which form of regime, and also, the destruction of regimes and their preservation, from what sort of people their origin, and what are their causes. (1316b30-36)

LS: [. . .] is a reference obviously to book 5, and to large parts of book 4, but rather selective.

Reader:

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

But as a matter of fact since there have come into existence several kinds of democracy and similarly of the other forms of regime, it will be well to consider at the same time any point that remains about these varieties. (1316b36-38)

LS: And now that is a transition to the theme of this book, democracy and the other regimes. Democracy is the only one mentioned by name; and as a matter of fact, he discusses only oligarchy, at least at some length. Democracy is apparently the most interesting, for it's the most important. A reason has been given. Now in Aristotle's time, when the cities have become large it is difficult to establish any regime other than democracy, and therefore it is practically the most important kind.

I find an interesting remark on the meaning of this book in Thomas's commentary, Thomas Aquinas. This section is not written by Thomas Aquinas but by somebody else. Do you know who wrote the bulk of that commentary? Half of [it]?ⁱⁱ "The philosopher has determined about the principles and courses that corrupt and save commonwealth, in general and in particular. He will now show out of which things and in what manner commonwealth ought to be established, constructed." In other words, this is a more practical book, advising its publisher, its founder, what to do. "In the first place, he explains out of what and how the defective regimes are established: democracy and oligarchy." Very orthodox Aristotelian remark. "In the following book," book 7, "he will discuss the construction of the best regime." This is a sensible remark, obviously. Now let us go on in reading book 6. 1317a10.

Reader:

Now it has been stated before what kind of democracy is suited for what kind of city, and similarly which of the kinds of oligarchy is suited to which kind of populace, and also which of the remaining regimes is advantageous for which people; but nevertheless since it must not only be made clear which variety of these regimes is best for cities, but also how both these best varieties and the other forms must be established, let us briefly pursue the subject. (1317a10-16)

LS: Here is clear the establishment of the regime. [. . .] Now this reminds us of an issue which has become very important in modern times since the French Revolution and the reaction to it. I mean, if we translate *politeia* by constitution, as is ordinarily done, it means Aristotle believes that constitution can be made, as the French Revolutionists thought, as the founding fathers thought. And then in the great reaction to the French Revolution starting with Edmund Burke,ⁱⁱⁱ this was questioned: constitutions cannot be made; they grow. Now although Aristotle seems to be very close to Edmund Burke, or vice versa, and there is very much in common, but in this fundamental issue there is a fundamental difference. Constitutions can be made; and in a way their conscious making is superior to their growth because it can be done with both eyes open. Now let us go on here.

ⁱⁱ It was completed by Peter of Auvergne; see *The Commentary of Peter of Auvergne on Aristotle's Politics* (Rome: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1967).

ⁱⁱⁱ Burke, *Letters on a Regicidal Peace*, in *The Works of Edmund Burke* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), vol. 5, 253–54.

Reader:

And first let us speak about democracy for at the same time the fact will also become clear about the opposite form of regime, that is, the regime which some people call oligarchy. (1317a16-18)

LS: That is also a strange expression, “which some people call oligarchy.” This indicates that this is not a foregone conclusion. Whether he meant one should call it plutocracy, I do not know, but it is a strange remark.

Reader:

We must take into view all the features that are popular and that are thought to go with democracies—

LS: “Popular” here in the sense of belonging to a popular regime.

Reader:

For it comes about from combinations of things that the kinds of democracy are formed, and that there are different democracies and more than one sort. In fact there are two causes for there being several kinds of democracy, first the one stated before, the fact that the populations are different (for we find one multitude engaged in agriculture—

LS: And so on. And the second . . .

Reader:

cause is the one about which we now speak. For the institutions that go with democracies and seem to be appropriate for this form of regime make the democracies different by their combinations; for one form of democracy will be accompanied by fewer, another by more, and another by all of them. And it is serviceable to ascertain each of them both for the purpose of instituting whichever of these kinds of democracy one happens to wish and for the purpose of amending existing ones. For people setting up constitutions seek to collect together all the features appropriate to their fundamental principle, but in so doing they make a mistake, as has been said before in the passage dealing with the causes of the destruction and the preservation of the regime. And now let us state the postulates, the ethical characters and the aims of the various forms of democracy. (1317a19-39)

LS: And now we come to the definition of democracy from the point of view of its end or moral character, and that we have to consider very carefully.

Reader:

Now the^{iv} fundamental principle—

LS: The Greek word is [*hypothesis*]. Hypothesis in the original meaning of the term: what you lay down, what you assume—not in order to check it by experiment or what not, but what you assume in order to go on. The fundamental assumption.

^{iv} Rackham has “a.”

Reader:

The premise of the democratic form of regime is liberty—that is what is usually asserted, implying that only under this regime do men participate in liberty, for they assert this is the aim of every democracy. But one factor of liberty is to govern and be governed in turn; for the popular principle of justice is to have equality according to number, not worth, and if this is the principle of justice prevailing, the multitude must of necessity be sovereign and the decision of the majority must be final and must constitute justice, for they say that each of the citizens ought to have an equal share; so that it results that in democracies the poor are more powerful than the rich, because there are more of them and whatever is decided by the majority is sovereign. This then is one mark of liberty which all democrats set down as a principle of the constitution. And one is for a man to live as he likes; for they say that this is the function of liberty, inasmuch as to live not as one likes is the life of a man who is a slave. This is the second principle of democracy, and from it has come the claim not to be governed, preferably not by anybody, or failing that, to govern and be governed in turns; and this is the way in which the second principle is introduced to equalitarian liberty. (1317a40-b16)

LS: So there are two ingredients of democracy—of freedom, of liberty—and one is ruling and being ruled in turn, and the second is to do what one likes. According to Aristotle, then, ancient democracy was already in a sense liberal, namely, permissive. There is no obvious necessity why democracy should be permissive. There have been examples even in Athens of a very unpermissive conduct, for example, at the beginning of the Sicilian expedition, the conduct toward [Alcibiades]^v and other things.

But let us proceed step by step. I think the starting point should be the second one: the characteristic concern of democracy is that everyone would wish to live as he likes, and this in itself means of course not to be ruled by anyone, because the man who rules you will not permit you in all cases to do what you like. But this is manifestly impossible. Therefore, not to be ruled by anyone who is not ruled by you in turn, i.e., that all have a title to rule and all rule together. Since freedom primarily means to live as one likes, and this is the starting point, there can be no total submission to what Rousseau has called the general will. But the regime must be permitted. Only in this way, I think, can one understand the connection between these two ingredients.

Now what is this strict connection between democracy and permissiveness? Because this has not yet become clear. If we start from the phenomenon, from the surface, democracy is the rule of the poor, and that means according to Aristotle the rule of the uneducated, of the vulgar, of the people lacking self-control, lacking severity to one's self. In 1319b30, if you can find this quickly.

Reader:

[The characteristics of a tyranny also are all thought to be democratic,]¹ I mean for instance license among slaves, which may really be advantageous for the popular party up to a point,

^v Strauss apparently misspeaks and says "Socrates."

and among women and children, and indulgence to live as one likes. A regime of this sort will have a large number of supporters, and disorderly living is pleasanter to the many of mankind. (1319b28-32)

LS: So in other words, this is the connection, starting from the other side. The poor, rule of the poor, rule of these who lack orderliness, in the higher forms of it. Do we not know from other times the phenomenon of a very unpermissive democracy, of Puritan democracies? Ascribing for a moment that [Cromwell's] army was a democratic organization, now what would Aristotle say to that? Here these were people of much sterner self-restraint than the Cavaliers? What would Aristotle say to that?

Student: They were based on religion, rather than the city . . .

LS: There is no Aristotelian word for religion.

Same Student: Well, based on God.

LS: There is an un-Aristotelian word, coined according to Aristotle's habits: theocracy. Aristotle² [would] say this is a theocracy, and I think quite a few soldiers of [. . .]^{vi} would heartily agree. That's not a democracy, but a theocracy. So that is a special case. So this is in a way clear. This is the central passage about democracy in the whole work. Aristotle continues by giving a list of institutions which follow from the democratic hypothesis. We can read a few lines; read the beginning only.

Reader:

And these principles having been laid down and this being the nature of democratic government, the following institutions are democratic in character: election of officials by all from all; government of each by all, and of all by each in turn; election by lot either to all magistracies or to all that do not need experience and skill; no property qualification for office, or only a very low one; no office to be held twice, or more than a few times, by the same person; or few offices except the military ones— (1317b17-24)

LS: And so on. Aristotle doesn't give now a detailed deduction why all these elements follow from the primary aim of democracy, but it is plausible enough in itself, and unnecessarily pedantic to do so. Let us turn to 1318a3.

Reader:

These then are the features common to democracies. But what is thought to be the extreme form of democracy and of popular government comes about as a result of the principle of justice that is admitted to be democratic, and this is for all to have equality according to number. For it is equality for the poor to have no larger share of power than the rich, and not for the poor alone to be supreme but for all to govern equally; for in this way they would feel that the regime possessed both equality and liberty. But the question follows, how will they have equality? (1318a3-12)

^{vi} Perhaps "the New Model Army."

LS: Let us stop at this point. This is a difficult passage, and I believe that the difficulty is partly caused by the misunderstanding of the remark here made, namely, when he says it follows out of that notion of justice which is agreed to be democratic, and that is that all should have arithmetic equality. From this it follows that democracy [. . .] which seems to be the highest degree [of] democracy. And now he makes a strange turn. He doesn't speak of the extreme democracy here [. . .] sense, but another conclusion from the primary notion of democracy. There should be equality, but then we find the city consists of the rich and the poor. Now must this important cleavage not be considered? Must, therefore, democracy guarantee the right of the rich, giving them a special representation? That is developed in the sequel. Perhaps you read the immediate sequel.

Reader:

The question follows, how will they have their equality? Are the property assessments of five hundred citizens to be divided among a thousand and the thousand to have equal power to the five hundred? Or is equality on this principle not to be arranged in this manner, but the division into classes to be taken as this system, for then an equal number to be taken from the five hundred and from the thousand and these to control the election and the law courts? Is this then the justest form of regime in accordance with popular justice, or is it rather one that goes by counting heads? (1318a11-18)

LS: The general answer for Aristotle is of course the first. This regime, which gives the rich greater rights than their mere numbers would deserve, that is the justest democratic regime. Now why should this be democratic? I think the reasoning is as follows. Democracy does not say—at least the democracy Aristotle knew: All power to the poor. Then this would be out of the question. Then any rights would be given to the rich as rich. But all power to all, and therefore of course also to the rich. There is something concealed in that which Aristotle does not spell out, perhaps because it was too obvious. In particular, he did not know modern ways of thinking, which is our trouble, that we have to liberate ourselves away from our ways of thinking in order to understand Aristotle.

In modern times there would be no difficulty to say all the power to the poor, or special regard for the underdog—no difficulty whatever. But that was unbearable and unintelligible to men like Aristotle and his contemporaries, the reason being this: the title to rule cannot derive from a defect as defect—like poverty, like being an underdog—but the title to rule can only derive from excellence. Such an excellence is free birth, and therefore the democratic principle is free birth, and there is obviously a connection between free birth and freedom as a principle of democracy. It is not stated by Aristotle explicitly, but it comes out in Plato's *Republic*, book 8 of the *Republic*, when he speaks of democracy.

If democracy is then the rule of the all freeborn, freedom being freeborn, is not a preserve of the poor. Therefore, by accepting the principle of freedom, the democracy must give full citizen rights to those freeborn who happen to be rich. But once you have granted that, then you can be led, or some of us can be led, to the consequence that there must be a protection of the rich as rich, because if there is no such protection, everybody will be confiscated by

[. . .] In the sequel Aristotle speaks of the institutional consequences from democracy thus understood, 1318a27.

Reader:

But both views involve inequality and injustice; for if the will of the few is to prevail, this means a tyranny, since if one man owns more than the other rich men, according to the oligarchic principle of justice it is just for him to rule alone; whereas if the will of the numerical majority is to prevail, they will do injustice by confiscating the property of the rich minority, as has been said before. What form of equality therefore would be one on which both parties will agree must be considered in the light of the principles of justice as defined by both sets. For they say that whatever seems good to the majority of the citizens ought to be sovereign. Let us then accept this principle, yet not wholly without qualification, but inasmuch as fortune has brought into existence two component parts of the city, rich and poor, let any resolution passed by both classes, or by a majority of each, be sovereign, but if the two classes carry opposite resolutions, let the decision of the majority, in the sense of the group whose total property assessment is the larger, prevail: for instance, if there are ten rich citizens and twenty poor ones, and opposite votes have been cast by six of the rich on the one side and by fifteen of the less wealthy on the other, four of the rich have sided with the poor and five of the poor with the rich; then the side that has the larger total property when the assessments of both classes of either side are added together carries the voting. But if the totals fall out exactly equal, this is to be deemed an impasse common to both sides, as it is at present if the assembly or law court is exactly divided; either a decision must be made by casting lots or some other such device must be adopted. But on questions of equality and justice, even though it is very difficult to discover the truth about them, nevertheless it is easier to hit upon it than to persuade people that have the power to get an advantage to agree to it; equality and justice are always sought by the weaker party, but those that have the upper hand pay no attention to them. (1318a22-b5)

LS: So Aristotle is not too sanguine, as you see. But the point which is of more immediate interest to us is the one which I stated before. Aristotle regards a regime which divides a whole citizen body, or say the assembly or the law courts, into the poor and the rich, and giving in principle equal right to both groups, still as democratic for the reasons which I tried to state. In the sequel he speaks of some further characteristics of democratic institutions. We can read that, the immediate sequel.

Reader:

There being four kinds of democracy, the best is the one that stands first in structure, as was said in the discourses preceding these; it is also the oldest of them all—

LS: By the way, do you remember that I said on an earlier occasion what Aristotle declares to be the best regime simply, I mean kingship, belongs also to the olden times? And that is repeated here again as regards democracy: the best democracy is the oldest kind of democracy. This leads to the great difficulty that the peak of political life and the peak of intellectual life belong to different eras.

Reader:

By first I mean first as it were in a classification of the kinds of common people. The best common people are the agricultural population, so that it is possible to introduce democracy as well as other forms of regime where the many^{vii} live by agriculture or by pasturing cattle. For owing to their not having much property they are busy, so that they cannot often meet at the assembly, while owing to their having the necessities of life they pass their time attending to their farmwork and do not covet their neighbors' goods, but find more pleasure in working than in taking part in politics and holding office, where the profits to be made from the offices are not large; for the many^{viii} are more covetous of gain than of honor. And this is indicated by the fact that men endured the tyrannies of former times, and endure oligarchies, if a ruler does not prevent them from working or rob them; for then some of them soon get rich and the others free from want. And also, if they have any ambition, to have control over electing magistrates and calling them to account makes up for the lack of office, since in some democracies even if the people have no part in electing the magistrates but these are elected by a special committee selected in turn under the whole number, as at Mantinea, yet if they have the power of deliberating on policy, the many^{ix} are satisfied. (And this too must be counted as one form of democracy, on the lines on which it once existed at Mantinea.)

Indeed it is for this reason that it is advantageous for the form of democracy spoken of before, and is a customary institution in it, for all the citizens to elect the magistrates and call them to account, and to try lawsuits, but for the holders of the greatest magistracies to be elected and to have property qualifications, the higher offices being elected for the higher property grades, or else for no office to be elected on a property qualification, but for officials to be chosen on the ground of capacity. And a city governed in this way is bound to be governed well (for the offices will always be administered by the best men with the consent of the people and without their being jealous of the upper classes), and this arrangement is certain to be satisfactory to the upper classes and notables, for they will not be under the government of others inferior to themselves, and they will govern justly because a different class will be in control of the audits—since it is expedient to be in a state of suspense and not to be able to do everything exactly as seems good to one, for liberty to do whatever one likes cannot guard against the evil that is in every man's character. Hence there necessarily results the condition of affairs that is the most advantageous in the government of cities—for the upper classes to govern without doing wrong, the common people not being deprived of any rights. (1318b6-1319a3)

LS: This is the most emphatic passage in the whole book, I would say. So one has to raise the question which I did raise at the beginning: Why is Aristotle not perfectly satisfied with it? It gives him everything he wants and everyone could reasonably expect, but the difficulty remains: the subordination of the better to the worse, which is a fundamental flaw in Aristotle's [. . .] And therefore he has divided books 6, 7, and 8, and any further

^{vii} Rackham has "multitude."

^{viii} Rackham has "mass of mankind."

^{ix} Rackham has "multitude."

books which he might have written or has written but which have been lost, in order to [. . .] a nondemocratic state. To this we will return next time.

This question of the bad or the low which is in every one of us, this question came up on an earlier occasion. Do you remember the occasion?

Student: It was a translation to the effect that [. . .] man's nature . . .

LS: That would be misleading. All kinds of desires are in every human being, but Aristotle does not preclude the possibility that there are some who have them habitually under control. This would be the man of virtue. But it is still there, and it is possible that too great temptations might upset the balance.

Student: I have a question about the kingship being the best regime and the one of earlier times. That kingship which Aristotle talked about in book 3 seems to be the kingship of a man who is so far superior to all others as not even to be in a class with them. Would this be the man . . .

LS: Precisely. Because in this original chaos, the men who established civil society or made [the] most important inventions, the benefactors of man, they would be more needed and therefore more likely to occur then than later. We also read a passage in book 4, when he gave the description of how regimes change in chronological order, power to the increase in population—a passage which culminated in the statement that today, in the large cities only democracy is possible, and there at the beginning there is kingship. Now let us turn to 1319a19.

Reader:

After the agricultural community the best kind of democracy is where the people are herders and get their living from cattle; for this life has many points of resemblance to agriculture, and as regards military duties pastoral people are in a very well-trained condition and serviceable in body and capable of living in the open. But almost all the other classes—

LS: Aristotle did not say that there are better agricultural people than pastoral people.

Student: No, I did not say that. I said that they had a better constitution in the sense of physical constitution. They were better able to endure hardship.

LS: But that he does not say. He simply says they are trained to the highest degree. He doesn't deny that there are farmers, men who would also be trained to the highest degree.

Reader:

Almost all the other classes of the populace, of which the remaining kinds of democracy are composed, are very inferior to these, for their mode of life is mean, and there is no element of virtue in any of the occupations in which the multitude of artisans and market

people and the wage earning class take part, and also owing to their loitering about the market place and the city almost all people of this class find it easy to attend the assembly; whereas the farmers owing to their being scattered over the country do not attend—
(1319a19-32)

LS: That is clear, what Aristotle says about the hierarchy of the various kinds of democracies; and in the sequel Aristotle speaks of how to establish the inferior kinds of democracy, and a few of the things are quite interesting immediately to us on the basis of our modern experience. 1319b19: “The following arrangements are useful for the establishment of a democracy of this kind.”^x

Reader:

such as were employed by Cleisthenes at Athens when he wished to increase the power of the democracy, and by the party setting up the democracy at Cyrene; different tribes and brotherhoods must be created outnumbering the old ones—

LS: In other words, the greatest modern example is the replacement of the French provinces by the departments according to natural geographic unities, and not according to traditional, conventional unities.

Reader:

and the celebration of private religious rites must be grouped together into a small number of public celebrations, and every device must be employed to make all the people as much as possible intermingled with one another—

LS: This is also intelligible, and known from modern experience [. . .]

Reader:

and to break up the previously existing groups of associates. Moreover the characteristics of a tyranny also are also thought to be democratic, I mean for instance license among the slaves, which may really be advantageous for the popular party up to a point, and among women and children, and indulgence to live as one likes; a regime of this sort will have a large number of supporters, as disorderly living is pleasanter to the many^{xi} than sober living. (1319b19-32)

LS: Permissiveness, of which we have spoken before. Do we have now clarity about the central concept about democracy, the central part of Aristotle's concept of democracy? This we should have achieved by now.

Student: The question I have raises a statement you made previously about Aristotle's objections to democracy being based upon responsiveness of those who are higher and those who are lower. It seems to me throughout the whole book or work, Aristotle points to the [. . .] of those who rule [. . .] and not be concerned about justice and he mentioned

^x Strauss's translation.

^{xi} Rackham has “mass of mankind.”

the evil that is [. . .] and this leaves a sort of conservative proposition in favor of democracy, like that of Niebuhr,^{xii} who said that it's that very possibility of evil in man which makes the democratic [. . .] necessary. I'm not at all clear why Aristotle wasn't aware of what can be done by the few who rule. They do yield a propensity for evil. Why isn't he willing to accept this democratic check?

LS: All right. This is very grand, the premise. Then there is also a need for a check on democracies, on the *dēmos*, because one cannot assume that the *dēmos* should be morally superior to the gentlemen.

Same Student: They may have collectively.

LS: And on the other hand, they may have individual wisdom, longer experience, less provincialism. That we do not see so clearly in our present-day mobile societies, but in the fourth and fifth centuries, that was quite obvious. For example, in Sicily before the Sicilian expedition, the leader of the *dēmos* in Syracuse was absolutely certain that the threatened Athenian invasion was a mere myth concocted by the notables in Syracuse in order to gain more power. Just as little as they, the Syracusan *dēmos*, would not make a military expedition against mainland Greece, as little would the Athenian *dēmos* make such an expedition against them. The man who knew that this was not a mere rumor, Hermocrates, was a leader of the notables.^{xiii} The reason why he knew: he knew from experience that the Athenian *dēmos* had this character, which the Syracusan *dēmos* lacked. Now here you have an example, a characteristic example, which would be an important argument for Aristotle in his life, that the knowledge required especially for foreign policies is not available to the simple worker and artisan and tradesman but only to people who can afford to travel and entertain correspondence with people in other cities. So that is not so simple. The collective wisdom makes sense regarding purely domestic affairs, taxes and so on, but not regarding these other [. . .]

Student: This question of giving the rich more and greater votes and greater power [. . .]

LS: Surely not in Athens, but in a democracy. But Aristotle is not in favor of the rich as rich; he only thinks they should not be despoiled of their property. Aristotle would like to have [it be] that the gentleman should have a privileged position. The gentlemen are usually men of some wealth, old wealth, inherited wealth, and not wealth as wealth, because the newly rich he did not particularly stomach.

Same Student: In a democracy he wanted the gentlemen to have more . . .

LS: Yes, but in a democracy the primary given fact is the rule of the *dēmos*, and whether

^{xii} Reinhold Niebuhr, American theologian; see his *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Scribner, 1964), 1: 223–27, 2: 249–56.

^{xiii} Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), 3: 241–59 (6.32–40). The leader of the Syracusan *dēmos* was named Athenagoras.

and to what extent they are prepared to listen to the gentlemen is the question. You have the great example of Pericles, who was a gentleman in this sense and who was the leader of the *dēmos* for a considerable time; and the people of Athens trusted him, not without fining him and doing things against him from time to time, but on the whole they accepted his leadership. But Pericles was viewed by the gentlemen of Athens in about the same light in which Teddy Roosevelt was viewed by American gentlemen: a traitor of his class.

Aristotle thinks the case for the gentlemen is very strong. It is not unqualifiedly strong. It does not overturn all other arguments, because they are ordinarily a relatively small group and the claim of the many free citizens has to be considered. Therefore we must see when we come to book[s] 7 and 8 how Aristotle tries to solve this difficulty. We have a rule of gentlemen, and yet despite that, the fact of the problem of the *dēmos* remains, of the claims of the *dēmos* based on the sheer [numerical] power of the many.

In the sequel there is the point which is much too long to read here. The point which Aristotle discusses is how one could make a democracy stable, in 1320a, and not to believe that it is democratic or oligarchic . . .

Reader:

which will cause the city to be democratically or oligarchically governed in the greatest degree, but that which will cause it to be so governed for the longest time. (1320a3-4)

LS: A modern example is proportional representation, which on the face of it is more democratic than any other form of representation. There is no segment of the population, given a certain minimum strength, which will not be represented in the central representative body—but which taken literally means of course the emergence of many splinter parties, enormous difficulties of getting a working government. And so it is more democratic and yet damaging to the lasting character of the democracy; and similar things regarding oligarchy can also be made.

Among the devices which Aristotle mentioned regarding the preservation of oligarchy, there is also what he says about what one can call social policy, in 1320a29.

Reader:

men must not do what the demagogues^{xiv} do now (for they use the surplus for doles, and people no sooner get them than they want the same doles again, because this way of helping the poor is the legendary jar with the hole in it), but the truly democratic statesman must study how the multitude may be saved from extreme poverty; for this is what causes democracy to be corrupt. Measures must therefore be contrived that may bring about lasting prosperity. And since this is advantageous also for the well-to-do, the proper course is to collect all the proceeds of the revenues into a fund and distribute this in lump sums to the needy, best of all, if one can, in sums large enough for acquiring a small estate, or, failing this, to serve as capital for trade or husbandry, and if this is not possible for all, at

^{xiv} Rackham has “popular leaders”

all events to distribute the money by tribes or some other division of the population in turn— (1320a29-b2)

LS: What today would be local government. The smaller tribe means the administrative unit—of which, say, Athens consisted not of tribes in the sense of tribally living people.

Reader: The idea is, if you haven't got enough to spread it all around, judiciously chosen model cities programs . . .

while in the meantime the well-to-do must contribute pay for attendance at the necessary assemblies, being themselves excused from useless public services. By following some such policy as this, the Carthaginians had won the friendship of the common people; for they constantly send out some of the people to the surrounding territories and so make them well-off. And if the notables are men of good feeling and sense they may also divide the needy among them in groups and supply them with capital to start them in businesses. (1320b2-10)

LS: And so on. These examples are sufficient.

Student: This is today a very real issue in modern welfare economics [. . .] especially some [. . .] of this University are proposing outright grants, whereas modern-day liberals seem to have opposed this on the basis of the needy being unwise; for instance that they would spend the money on liquor rather than on their children, as seen in the food stamp program, where one is limited ³[in] what one can buy. From Aristotle's assumption as to why men achieve the state they do in nature, would I be correct in assuming then that the needy are needy because they are less naturally endowed as men and would suffer from the lack of judgment in using these outright grants?

LS: Not quite, not quite, because Aristotle does not have this belief that wealth is a proof of a great natural [. . .]^{xv}In other words, Aristotle is not Locke; and Locke speaks of the rational and industrious, and that is not Aristotle's view of looking at things. That is not so, but there is a scarcity; and since private property is highly desirable for the reasons given in the criticism of Plato, it will follow that you will have the difference between rich and poor, and there will always be more poor than rich. This is a fact. The rich as rich are not morally superior. Aristotle never says so. Plato does say that⁴ in the *Republic*, book 8, but Plato has special purposes. He takes the rich as the men who have at least to control their lower appetites, their lowest appetite with a view to their increasing their wealth, so that the love of wealth is somewhat austere [. . .] controls their hedonistic tendencies and that is, as Plato likes to present it there, somewhat better than the complete lack of self-control. But Aristotle doesn't do that; he has no particular admiration for the rich as rich. You only have to read the chapter in the *Rhetoric* where he speaks about the character of the rich to see that.^{xvi} The gentlemen are—that's something different; the gentlemen must have some

^{xv} The original transcript has "*polis*" here. Strauss presumably said something like "superiority" or "ability."

^{xvi} Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.16 (1390b–1391a).

wealth; they cannot be poor people. But they are the men who are not characterized by wealth; their wealth is only a condition for their life. What is characteristic of them is their [. . .] meaning their moral formation, which is not separable indeed from having heard and seen many beautiful things, like music and paintings and so on. That is something different, the gentlemen. Did I answer your question?

Same Student: No. Aristotle's attempt would be to give them a start on the economy [which] would be predicated on the fact that they had enough character to use this wealth properly: not, for instance, for consumption but for investment, whether it be for themselves in the form of education or in earning assets. Is that not correct?

LS: Yes. This he obviously takes for granted. There are quite a few of the poor people who, if they had the opportunity to improve their conditions, would avail themselves of that. He doesn't have in mind anything like a [lumpen]proletariat, obviously. He has in mind people who have no considerable property and would like to improve their condition.

Same Student: However, the poor to date, not having an opportunity [. . .] because of their circumstances, how would they [. . .] this gift wisely?

LS: But assuming for a moment that there are some among them who have the thing in themselves, would it not be a pity if they were not given the opportunity?

Same Student: By nature have such character . . .

LS: Yes.

Same Student: Yes, it certainly would.

LS: I believe that it is what Aristotle would say. Now there are two more important sections in this book, in 1321a5 following,⁵ where Aristotle describes how the various kinds of the characters of the multitude, the farming and the others, are related to military qualities. Perhaps we'll read a part of that.

Reader:

And since the mass of the population falls principally into four divisions, the farming class, artisans, retail traders and hired laborers, and military forces are of four classes, cavalry, heavy infantry, light infantry and marines, in places where the country happens to be suitable for horsemanship, there natural conditions favor the establishment of an oligarchy that will be powerful (for the security of the inhabitants depends on the strength of this element, and keeping studs of horses is the pursuit of those who own extensive estates); and where the ground is suitable for heavy infantry, conditions favor the next form of oligarchy (for heavy infantry is a service for the well-to-do rather than the poor); but light infantry and naval forces are an entirely democratic element.

LS: "Naval forces" means of course here the rowers.

Reader:

As things are therefore, where there is a large multitude of this class, when party strife occurs the oligarchs often get the worst of the struggle; and a remedy for this must be adopted from military commanders, who combine with their cavalry and heavy infantry forces a contingent of light infantry. And this is the way in which the common people get the better over the well-to-do in outbreaks of party strife: being unencumbered they fight easily against cavalry and heavy infantry. Therefore to establish this force out of this class is to establish it against itself. (1321a5-23)

LS: So in other words,⁶ the higher classes must be able to beat the lower people at their game; a kind of counterinsurgency, if I may use a contemporary example. These are the irregulars [. . .] and they have under certain conditions a great superiority, as was shown in the War of Independence, for example.

Now the last item in 1321b4 following, the various kinds of offices. This has already been discussed before in book 4, but it is discussed here and will be brought up again later. Now as a specimen, we might just read 1321b11.

Reader:

First among the indispensable services is the superintendence of the market, over which there must be an official to superintend contracts and good order; since it is a necessity for almost all cities that people shall sell some things and buy others according to one another's necessary requirements, and this is the readiest means of securing self-sufficiency, which seems to be the reason for men's having united into a single city. (1321b11-16)

LS: And so on. He enumerates many more, and let us see in 1322a29, "Now these magistracies."

Reader:

therefore must be counted first as supremely necessary, and next to them must be put those that are not less necessary but are ranked on a higher grade of dignity, because they require much experience and trustworthiness; in this class would come the magistracies concerned with guarding the city and those assigned to military requirements. And both in peace and in war it is equally necessary for there to be magistrates to superintend the guarding of gates and walls. (1322a30-35)

LS: And so on. That is obvious. That is clear. And 1322b12.

Reader:

And by the side of all these offices is the one that is most supreme over all matters, for always the same magistracy has the execution of business that controls its introduction, or presides over the general assembly in places where the people are supreme; for the magistracy that convenes the sovereign assembly is bound to be the sovereign power in the

state. It is styled in some places the Preliminary Council because it considers business in advance, but where there is a democracy it is more usually called a Council. This more or less completes the number of the offices of a political nature. (1322b12-18)

LS: And then he speaks of the priests in the sequel; and then he does something which is remarkable, which we should at least note even if I am not able to explain that, in 1322b29.

Reader:

To sum up therefore, the necessary offices of superintendence deal with the following matters: institutions of religion, military institutions, revenue and expenditure, control of the market, citadel, harbors and country, also the arrangements of the law courts, registration of contracts, collection of fines, custody of prisoners, supervision of accounts and inspections, and the auditing of officials, and lastly the offices connected with the body that deliberates about public affairs. (1322b29-37)

LS: It is not quite clear why Aristotle repeats that⁷ immediately after that, and everyone who had followed the argument must have understood it. The usual way of solving these difficulties is to go over it with a very fine comb and see what is changed, omitted, or added. He makes again a point which he had already made before when he says somewhat later on that some of these offices or magistracies are not popular, like someone who is a supervisor of women and a supervisor of children, because the poor cannot keep their wives and children at home and therefore this supervision would be rescinded as an unnecessary hardship, whereas among the aristocracies this would be in order.

Student: Given the fact that the theme of Aristotle's political philosophy is the regime, what is the purpose for this little section here which we might say discusses the—in modern terms, the functions of prerequisites of all states. From a discussion we have had previously, this is in a sense a particularly modern notion, and you mentioned, for example, that there is no notion of order per se in classical philosophy although Aristotle seems to be discussing this.

LS: We spoke of this before, but it is a point which has been restated. There are things which every regime must have. For example, no regime can last without having security forces against foreign or domestic enemies; and there must be some revenue, and some way in which the expenditure is supervised, surely. These things as such are politically neutral, and they get their political flavor only when the political question is raised: Who is to appoint these officials? From whom are they to be directed? And this is politically more interesting, to state it somewhat frivolously, but surely the politically more important question is what divides the various regimes rather than what is common to all of them. But you see it already here that certain offices do not fit democracy. The council—which is one of the magistracies mentioned here, the council which prepares bills for the assembly—has a much smaller function in a democracy, in a strict democracy where the assembly, *dēmos*, decides than in a less democratic regime where the council is practically the ruling body. The issue which you have in mind is this: Can the politically neutral, that⁸ [which] is common to all regimes, be the key to

the particular, or is this not possible? And then Aristotle really says it is not, because the ends of the various regimes are different, divisive; and what Aristotle has in mind is confirmed by present-day usage, by the pejorative meaning of political. Political has this good meaning, obviously, and also this pejorative meaning; and this pejorative meaning nevertheless points to something of very great importance but it is something divisive because the ends differ. If there is an issue regarding which there can be no questions, say, in the case of a formal attack which must be resisted, then to that extent this decision would be made by any regime [and] therefore [is] not a politically divisive, not a strictly speaking political issue—unless it is complicated, unless it is an attack made by a democracy and the democrats in city B would like to be defeated by the democrats of city A in order to establish in their city a democracy, and so of course that is another story.

Session 14: November 22, 1967
Book 7, chapters 1–9

Leo Strauss: [In progress] —about the difficulty encountered in studying book 7, or its first part, and how this is related to the difficulties presented by the *Politics* as a whole, but you only alluded to the starting point of this difficulty, apparently because it was somewhat too massive for your sophisticated taste.ⁱ

There is a rather clear structure up to the end of book 3. Then in the manuscripts there occurs at the end of book 3 a sentence which is identical with the beginning of book 7. That could mean this: that books 7 and 8, or perhaps book 9, which was written [. . .] follow directly on book 3, and then we come to books 4, 5, and 6, or it could also mean that it is perhaps more reasonable to read books 1 to 6 in their sequel and then go over to book 7. The difference would be this: that the best regimes, in the plural, are discussed in books 3, 7, 8. Book 3 obviously [discusses] the best kingship, but Aristotle says at the beginning of book 4 that in the preceding book, book 3, he had also discussed aristocracy, so perhaps this refers to books 7 or 8. There is also the possibility that books 7 and 8, in the best regime discussed there, is not the aristocracy in the strictest sense of the word but the best polity, so that the word—you know, best regime [. . .] *politeia*—could also mean the best polity in the sense of that third one—you remember, kingship, aristocracy, a polity. That is the starting point of all difficulties.

You are right when you stated that it is difficult to say what kind of a regime that is, but it is not impossible, I believe, on the basis of today's society. I mean, who is and who is not a citizen in the best regime as presented in book 7?

Student: Those men who will deal with defending the regime, those who will govern it and those who will attend the religious practices.

LS: Will be members of the regime?

Same Student: Will be.

LS: And who will not be?

Same Student: Farmers and artisans will not be citizens.

LS: It is surely not a democracy, nor even a kind of mixture with democracy. To that extent, the question of what the best regime is has been answered. Now let us read some passages and see whether or not we can perhaps make some progress. The beginning of book 7 . . .

Reader:

The student who is going to make a suitable investigation of the best form of regime—

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

LS: The best regime. This is the point which is almost identical with what he says at the end of book 3. In Barker it is probably stated somewhere in a footnote. At the end of book 3 it is said, “After these things have been determined regarding the regime, we must now try to say in what manner it naturally comes into being, and in what manner it is natural to establish it.”ⁱⁱ First of all, you have to know what the best regime is. Secondly, you have to know how to establish it. Here in book 7 the establishment is a secondary consideration compared with the finding out of the character and the outline of the best regime. But let us now read from the beginning again.

Reader:

The student who is going to make a suitable investigation of the best regime must necessarily decide first of all what is the most desirable mode of life.

LS: Let us say the most [“choiceworthy”], which is more literal. “Desirable”¹ has been so misused in the last ten or twenty years, I thought we might keep it on a better keel.

Reader:

the most choiceworthy mode of life. For while this is uncertain it is also bound to be uncertain what is the best regime, since it is to be expected that the people who have the best regime available under their given conditions will fare the best, exceptional circumstances apart. (1323a13-18)

LS: You will see here that Aristotle, whatever the difficulties may be of this book, clearly makes here a new beginning. He begins again from the beginning, and the question is why? This question is obviously the most fundamental question, What is the most choiceworthy life?, and the whole political consideration depends on this decision.

Reader:

Hence we must first agree what life is most choiceworthy for almost all men, and after that whether the same life is most desirable both for the community and for the individual.

LS: Two questions which we must keep in mind: What is almost universally the most choiceworthy life; and second: Is that way of life the same for the cities and the individuals or not? Aristotle answers first the first question.

Reader:

Believing therefore in the adequacy of much of what is said even in extraneous discourses on the subject of² what is the best life, let us make use of these pronouncements now. For as regards at all events one classification of good things, putting them in three groups, external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body—

LS: Why does he change the order? Body and soul, in an ascending order.

Reader:

ⁱⁱ Strauss’s translation.

assuredly nobody would deny that the ideally happy, the most happy,ⁱⁱⁱ are bound to possess all three. For nobody would call a man truly^{iv} happy that has not got a particle of courage nor of temperance nor of justice nor of wisdom, but is afraid of the flies that flutter by him, cannot refrain from any of the most outrageous actions in order to gratify a desire to eat or to drink, ruins his dearest friends for the sake of a farthing, and similarly in matters of the intellect also is as senseless and mistaken as any child or lunatic. (1323a13-33)

LS: That is the starting point. That makes it very clear that for Aristotle, in Aristotle's view, the goods of the soul are the most important. The goods of the body and external goods are not to be despised. So Aristotle, while he begins at the beginning, he does not make a new investigation. He refers to what has been said in extraneous books, one could say in popular books, what is generally admitted. He starts from things which are generally admitted, from common sense in the original meaning of common sense. And I think there can be no doubt, we all can immediately understand that these are reasonable views, that a man who is constantly³ [fearful] of things which are not fear-inspiring and has no self-control whatever, he must be miserable throughout his life; and no one would wish to be miserable, or would wish it to anyone for whom he has any sympathy or concern. So the question of value judgments as now taken in the social sciences simply doesn't arise. Who can doubt of these things except a natural fool or a man who has no knowledge of human things whatever?

There is one difficulty which Aristotle does not take up here and to which he alludes from time to time, and that is this. We can say there is a self-evidence of decency. For example, self-control regarding sex—you see how decent, almost [. . .] Aristotle is: he mentions only food and drink, and not sex. This is a point which we rightly assume Aristotle would have been aware of. So this self-control is necessary for a happy life. It is still intelligible, I think, even in the age of the [. . .] When we speak of decency in this entirely general way, we assume that certain institutions, specific institutions, have the same status. For example, does self-control regarding sex necessarily imply a monogamous family? That is not yet settled. Or to take the most extreme example, incest between brothers and sisters: Is this necessarily an implication of self-control regarding sex, or could not this self-control also be practiced under different conditions? Aristotle alludes to this question at the end of *Ethics*, book 4, when he says that the perfectly virtuous man will never make a mistake. He will always act properly. He does not make a distinction, Aristotle says, between what is noble by nature or what is noble by convention.^v That is to say the perfect gentleman will respect the conventions of his society as well as what is intrinsically noble. The problem disappears in practice, the problem of the difference between these two ingredients. It does not disappear in theory, of course. This I think we should keep in mind.

Although the starting point is quite evident as stated by Aristotle here, and the question would arise only when it comes to the institutional implications of that, yet there is nevertheless disagreement. And what is that disagreement? In the immediate sequel.

ⁱⁱⁱ The reader adds "the most happy."

^{iv} Rackham has "ideally."

^v *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.9, 1128b21–25.

Reader:

But although these are propositions which when uttered everybody would agree to, yet men differ about amount and degrees of value. They think it is enough to possess however small a quantity of virtue, but of wealth, riches, power, glory and everything of that kind they seek a larger and larger amount without limit. We on the other hand—

LS: In other words, they would admit that goods of the soul are goods and important, but they would say: Yes, but perhaps the goods of the body and the external goods are more important. This point has not yet been clear. Go on.

Reader:

We^{vi} shall tell them that it is easy to arrive at conviction of these matters in the light of the^{vii} facts, when one sees that men do not acquire and preserve the virtues by means of these external goods, but external goods by means of the virtues, and that whether the life of happiness consists for man in enjoyment or in virtue or in both, it is found in larger measure with those who are of surpassingly high cultivation in character and in intellect but only moderate as regards the external acquisition of goods. (1323a33-b3)

LS: So this is Aristotle's brief reasoning to show that the external goods, and by implication also the goods of the body, are inferior in rank to the goods of the soul. In the first place, you cannot acquire or preserve the external goods without the virtues of the soul. He leaves it at this indication here. Then it would of course follow, which Aristotle does not elaborate here, that we cannot consistently maintain the utilitarian view, meaning the virtues are in the service of the acquisition or preservation of the external goods because of the glaring contrast between their rank. Very simply stated, we do not, unless we are completely vulgar individuals, respect a man because of his wealth. Maybe we respect him because of his use of his wealth, but then we can also on the same basis respect another man with a view to the way in which he [. . .] so what is intrinsically valuable are the goods of the soul. This was the first argument based on what we look at as the facts. He gives another argument in the immediate sequel, in 23b6.

Reader:

Not but what the truth is also easily seen if we consider the matter in the light of reason. For external goods have a limit, as has any instrument (and everything useful is useful for something), so an excessive amount of them must necessarily do harm, or do no good, to its possessor; whereas with any of the goods of the soul, the more abundant it is, the more useful it must be—if even to the goods of the soul not only the term 'noble' but also the term 'useful' can properly apply. (1323b6-13)

LS: So this is an argument according to reason, as the translator says, in Greek, *kata ton logon*, according to the *logos*. That is distinguished from the awareness based on the facts or the deeds. If we consider what Aristotle means by this expression, it is this. If we consider the external and internal goods explicitly as such, and without going into our experience of them, the external things as such—to consider them as such means to consider them essentially useful, i.e., useful

^{vi} The reader omits "on the other hand."

^{vii} The reader omits "actual."

for; and then we see that which is useful for something else is lower in rank than [that] for which it is useful. Therefore the goods of the soul are higher than the goods of the body.

The distinction between the noble and useful is of course crucial. “Noble” meaning here that which is choiceworthy for its own sake. In the Latin terminology it is the distinction between [. . .] and [. . .]

In the preceding passage it was suggested, not explicitly said, that happiness consists in virtue plus joy. The word which Aristotle uses, *chairein*, is not the same as the popular word for pleasure, *hēdonē*. Joy, shall we say. Let us turn to b21.

Reader:

Moreover it is for the sake of the soul that these goods are in their nature desirable, and that all wise men must choose them, not the soul for the sake of those other things. Let us then take it as agreed between us that to each man there falls just as large a measure of happiness as he achieves of virtue and wisdom and of virtuous and wise action. (1323b20-23)

LS: Let us stop here. The key words here are virtue and what he translates by wisdom. The word in Greek, *phronēsis*, is not wisdom simply—that would be *sophia*—but practical wisdom, prudence. Virtue and prudence together, and⁴ as Aristotle explains in the *Ethics*, they are inseparable. You cannot be virtuous without being prudent, nor can you be prudent without being virtuous. Vulgar prudence, that is according to Aristotle cleverness. That of course exists very well without any moral virtue. But the difference between prudence and cleverness is that prudence is essentially colored and formed even by moral virtue. The way in which this cooperation takes place is difficult to state.

So virtue here means then what Aristotle calls, and what has been called since Aristotle, moral virtue—moral virtue and this particular intellectual virtue that is prudence, the intellectual virtue governing human action. They together are the core of [. . .] The distinction between moral and intellectual virtue is simple to explain: I do not know whether some of you know that impressive man, Perry Mason, of whom his creator said his mind is like a steel trap and he is clean like a hound’s tooth.^{viii} That is a beautiful formulation of the difference between moral and intellectual virtue, only Aristotle believes that you cannot have such a truly steel trap mind without having it also be clean like a hound’s tooth. That is something which would need more special considerations. Now go on where we left off.

Reader:

In evidence of this we have the case of God, who is happy and blessed, but is so on account of no external goods, but on account of himself, and by being of a certain quality in his nature. (1323b23-26)

LS: Now how does Aristotle know this? I mean, he says we take as a witness, namely, call as a witness⁵ god, in the singular. Now what does he mean? Aristotle was not a thoughtless man. He

^{viii} Perry Mason is a fictional lawyer created by Erle Stanley Gardner; he was portrayed on long-running radio and television shows.

does not refer here to popular notions which were not necessarily [. . .] in Aristotle's time. Although Aristotle does not use this term^{ix}—it was coined in later time only—by god we represent a superhuman being, a being of superhuman perfection, excellence: a most perfect being, as it came to be called later; and therefore god cannot be a being which is blessed or happy by any of the external goods, because that would mean a dependence on the external goods [. . .] and he is good through himself and by being of a certain quality by nature⁶ in himself—not primarily with a view to any beneficent effects which he might produce, but in himself.

In the immediate sequel Aristotle makes then a distinction between happiness—in Greek *eudaimonia*—and *tychē*, having good luck; because this can happen to anyone, that he has a string of good luck and by some accidents he comes through life with all kinds of external blessings. This of course would not make him a happy man in the sense of *eudaimonia*. He would only be superficially enviable, but not respectable because it is in no way connected with his character. In 29, where we are now, he says: “Connected with this.”

Reader:

is a truth requiring the same arguments to prove it, that it is also the best city, and the one that does well, that is happy.

LS: In other words, here Aristotle answers in passing the question whether the best life for the individual and for the city [are the same]. This is one of the difficulties here that he answers in passing before he takes it up explicitly. Now turn to line 37.

Reader:

These remarks however must suffice by way of preface to our discourse: for neither is it possible to abstain from touching on these subjects altogether, nor is it feasible to follow out all the arguments that are germane to them, for that is the business of another course of study.

LS: The word used in Greek is *scholē*, from which our [word] “school” is derived, and which means originally leisure; but since the leisure time activity is thinking about worthwhile subjects, it finally acquired this meaning. Whether this is preserved in our present-day school activities, the notion of noble leisure, that is a long question. Go on.

Reader:

For the present let us take it as established that the best life, whether separately for an individual or collectively for cities, is the life conjoined with virtue furnished with sufficient means for taking part in virtuous actions; while objections to this position we must pass over in the course of the present inquiry, and reserve them for future consideration, if anyone is found to disagree with what has been said. (1323b37-1324a4)

LS: So for Aristotle, in other words, the issue is not completely settled, but it is sufficiently settled on the basis of common sense. There might be subtle issues which are not so necessary for our practical purpose.

^{ix} The term in question seems to be “superhuman.”

At this point Aristotle turns to the second question which he had raised and which he had already answered in passing: Is the best way of life the same for the individual and for the city, or not? He has answered the question but he has not discussed it thematically, and that he will do from now on. Now begin here at this point.

Reader:

On the other hand it remains to say whether the happiness of a city is to be pronounced the same as that of each individual man, or whether it is different. Here too the answer is clear: everybody would agree that it is the same; for all those who base the good life upon wealth in the case of the individual, also assign felicity to the city as a whole if it is wealthy; and all who value the life of the tyrant highest, would also say that the city which rules the widest empire is happiest; and if anyone accepts the individual as happy on account of virtue, he will also say that the city which is the better morally is the happier. (1324a5-13)

LS: All right. So here again Aristotle has recourse to common opinion, but in a more general way. All admit that what is the best way for the individual is the best way for the *polis*, whatever they may understand by the best way in each case. Now what about this common opinion, that whatever man regards as best for the individual he must regard as best for the community? Is this necessarily the case? Or is there not a certain premise made here, a hidden premise? I give you an example. In Spinoza's *Political Treatise*, we read that liberty of the mind is the private virtue but the virtue of a state is security.^x Liberty of the mind, in the full sense of the word in which Spinoza means it, and security are two entirely different ends. At least in modern times it became possible to make a distinction between the end of the commonwealth and the end of the individual, and I think today the underlying view is also this. There must be some end of the commonwealth, otherwise there would be no commonwealth; but the individuals might pursue the most different ends, each having⁷ [another] notion of happiness, and that is based—and I think I mentioned this before—on the distinction between happiness and the pursuit of happiness. Since everyone understands something else by happiness, happiness cannot be the objective of civil society; but everyone must be entitled to pursue happiness as he understands happiness. So pursuit of happiness on the one hand, and happiness on the other would correspond to that distinction between the virtue of the individual and the virtue of the commonwealth of which Spinoza speaks. Now let us go on.

Reader:

But there now arise these two questions which require consideration: first, which mode of life is the more desirable, the life of active citizenship and participation in politics, or rather the life of an alien and that of detachment from political associations;^{xi} next, what regime and what organization of the city is to be deemed the best,—either on the assumption that to take an active part in the state is desirable for everybody, or that it is undesirable for some men although desirable for most. (1324a14-19)

LS: So now what are these questions? Which way of life is the best? And here there is the

^x Benedict de Spinoza, *A Political Treatise*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 290 (I.6).

^{xi} Rackham has “the political partnership.”

specific theme of book 8⁸ of the *Politics*—and not of earlier books of it—or of the *Ethics*. Which way of life is the best, namely, the political life, the life of the citizen, or that of the stranger? This is the question to which there is no longer a commonsense answer to the broad question answered before: Is virtue the highest good, or the *polis* of the soul—I'm sorry, the goods of the soul? And second, the question: Which way of life is best for the city, the political life or the nonpolitical life?

Student: By the life of the stranger, the nonpolitical life, does this imply the life of the philosopher?

LS: Yes. He will even mention that later. That is the concern, of course. But the difficulty is, naturally: How can this be applied to the *polis*? If it should prove to be that there is a different way of life for the individual, say, the philosophical life, and the philosophic way of life is not the possible way of life for the *polis*, then we have a terrible cleavage between the individual and the city. Do you see that? Just as in the modern allegories which I gave, only the content is different. Therefore that is of very great importance.

Aristotle will discuss in the present work only, as he makes clear, the question: What is best for the *polis*, the political life or the life of a stranger? How can a *polis* live as a stranger? That seems to be quite absurd. Now let us turn to line 33.

Reader:

And it makes no little difference which way the truth lies; for assuredly the wise are bound to arrange their affairs in the direction of the better goal—and this applies to the city collectively as well as to the individual human being. Some persons think that empire over one's neighbors, if despotically exercised— (1324a33-38)

No, tyrannically?

LS: Where are you now?

Reader: Line 33.

LS: 23, I said.

Reader: My apologies.

Now it is clear that the best regime is the system under which anybody whatsoever would be best off and would live in felicity; but the question is raised even on the part of those who agree that a life accompanied by virtue is the most desirable, whether the life of citizenship and activity is the most desirable or rather a life released from all external affairs, for example some form of contemplative life, which is said by some to be the only life that is philosophic. For it is manifest that these are the two modes of life principally chosen by the men most ambitious of excelling in virtue, both in past times and at the present day—I mean the life of politics and the life of philosophy. (1324a23-29)

LS: Can there be a philosophic life of the *polis*? Aristotle directed this question in the shortest form. He develops this question, this apparently impossible question, in the sequel. Let us drop the next sentence and go to line 35.

Reader:

Some persons think that empire over one's neighbors, if despotically exercised, involves a definite injustice of the greatest kind, and if politically,^{xii} although it carries no injustice, yet is a hindrance to the ruler's own well-being; but others hold almost the opposite view to these—they think that the life of action and citizenship is the only life fit for a man, since with each of the virtues its exercise in actions is just as possible for men engaged in public affairs and in politics as for those who live a private life. Some people then hold the former view, while others declare that the despotic and tyrannical form of regime alone achieves happiness; and in some cities it is also the distinctive aim of the regime and the laws to enable them to exercise despotic rule over their neighbors. Hence even though with most peoples most of the legal ordinances have been laid down virtually at random, nevertheless if there are places where the laws aim at one definite object, that object is in all cases power, as in Sparta and Crete both the system of education and the mass of the laws are framed in the main with a view to war; and also among all the non-Hellenic nations that are strong enough to expand at the expense of others, military strength has been held in honor, for example, among the Scythians, Persians, Thracians, and Celts. (1324a35-b12)

LS: Let us stop here one moment. Aristotle restates the issue, the philosophic or practical life with a view to the *polis*, in more specific terms. The alternative is⁹ justice in foreign affairs or unscrupulous imperialism, as we would say. And now what has this to do with the philosophic and the practical life? There is of course no identity, but only a resemblance or analogy. Justice in foreign affairs corresponds somehow on the political plane to the philosophic life. The unscrupulous imperialism corresponds on the political plane to the practical or political life. That is very extraordinary.

Here in passing he mentions a point of utmost importance when he speaks of Sparta and Crete, ordinarily regarded as the best of the Greek cities. These cities have at least one comprehensive objective in their legislation, but this is a rather low one. Power, as he translates, or rule over others and war by which such rule is achieved. If this is so, if there is not a single city in existence which aims at virtue in the fullest sense and not only at military virtue, is Machiavelli not right when he says that Aristotle—he does not mention any names, but Aristotle among others has been concerned with imaginary commonwealths, with commonwealths which never have been found among human beings, and therefore that political theory must proceed in an entirely different manner?

Student: Is it necessarily the case that [if] what seems to be best for the individual and the *polis* are different, there will be a conflict here? That is, there occurs to me this concept of the invisible hand. Is this a possibility which Aristotle considers? For instance, if it is best for the individual to lead the philosophic life, could we not presume that in leading such a life he

^{xii} Rackham has "constitutionally."

would consider the issue of best regimes while not intending to bring this to the *polis*?

LS: Your suggestion is not concrete enough. How would it work out? Aristotle would sit together with other younger men, probably, and discuss with them the question of the best regime, and that is that. Where does the political influence come in?

Same Student: But if this were the case of the largest majority of the people, who individually opted for this philosophic life?

LS: But how is this feasible given an economy of scarcity, which Aristotle presupposes?

Same Student: I'm not sure it is. That's the question I'm asking.

LS: I don't believe that the solution to Aristotle's question can be found along these lines. So we must keep this passage in mind, what he says here,¹⁰ that most of the laws are given just in order to solve burning questions and not with a view to a comprehensive goal. The two cities in which we find such an attempt of a consistent, comprehensive legislation do not aim at virtue. Is there not perhaps some impossibility for the city to be concerned with virtue? This was generally speaking the tendency of the leaders of that modern movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and even up to the present time, but this also did not lead to a very satisfactory answer.

Student: Is it possible to answer the second question regarding which way of life is better for the city without having previously answered the first question?

LS: The question has been answered. First of all, virtue is the core of happiness. Second, on this basis the further question arises: Is virtue above all moral virtue, or is virtue in the highest sense the theoretical [. . .] That is the question.

Aristotle has indicated—we know it from his *Ethics*—that the theoretical life is the highest. But must it not also therefore be the highest life for the *polis*, because everybody admits, as he says, that the aim or end of the *polis* is the same for the individual? Now if this should prove to be untenable, then we have to make great revisions, or rather we have to make explicit those revisions which Aristotle has implicitly [made] because this is a question of which he was aware. Now let us turn to 1324b22. We cannot possibly read everything.

Reader:

Nevertheless those who wish to examine the matter closely might perhaps think it exceedingly strange that it should be the business of a statesman to be able to devise means of holding empire and mastery over the neighboring peoples— (1324b22-25)

LS: Aristotle is now discussing the political life of the *polis*, meaning unscrupulous imperialism. I don't know whether I have made sufficiently clear the simple analogy. The theoretical life, and that is the practical life. [LS writes on the blackboard] Here we have decent foreign policy, which I will designate by the very sophisticated symbol DFP. Here I will

designate by M, meaning Machiavelli. You see there is a great difficulty already in this proportion. Why should the correspondent of the political plane, of the moral practical life, be Machiavellian? This would make somewhat more sense, because the theoretical men are men of peace and do not make high demands, at least in former times, on money [. . .] and so that makes sense. That they should be in favor of and correspond to the P, political life, that is the question. Now Aristotle discusses this one.

Reader:

to devise means of holding empire and mastery over the neighboring peoples whether they want it or not. How can that be worthy of a statesman or lawgiver which is not even lawful? And government is not lawful when it is carried on not only justly but also unjustly—and superior strength may be unjustly exercised. Moreover we do not see this in the other sciences either: it is no part of a physician's or ship captain's business to use either persuasion or compulsion upon the patients in the one case or the crew in the other. Yet most people seem to think that despotic rule is statesmanship, and are not ashamed to practice toward others treatment which they declare to be unjust and detrimental for themselves; for in their own internal affairs they demand just government, yet in their relations with other peoples they pay no attention to justice. Yet it is strange if there is not a natural distinction between peoples suited to be despotically ruled and these not suited; so that if this is so, it is not proper to attempt to exercise despotic government over all people, but only over those suited for it, just as it is not right to hunt human beings for food or sacrifice, but only the game suitable for this purpose, that is, such wild beasts as are good to eat. And moreover it is possible even for a single city in isolation to be happy, that is, one that is well-governed inasmuch as it is conceivable that a city might be carried on somewhere in isolation, enjoying good laws, and in such a state or city, the system of the regime will not be framed for the purpose of war or of overpowering its enemies—for we are to suppose everything to do with war is to be excluded.

It is evident therefore that while all military pursuits are to be deemed honorable, they are not so as being the ultimate end of all things, but as means to that end. And it is the business of the good lawgiver to study how a city, a race of men or any other community is to partake of the good life and the happiness possible for them. (1324b24-1325a10)

LS: Aristotle gives us here an inkling of what he means by a city which lives the theoretical life, and that is a city without any foreign relations: a radical isolationist; for example, on an island in former times, at least, with a long distance to any other island, it might be feasible. Aristotle doesn't say. You know of course as a fact that many utopias have been written in the course of the ages where the perfect society is presented as an island. This isolation is the optimum condition for not being dragged down by either neighbor, immoral neighbors, because if you have to fight them that is also some adaptation to them. This is the political equivalent to the theoretical man. Now let us read when he takes this up again. We skip quite a bit, 1325b14.

Reader:

But if these things are well said, and if happiness is to be defined as well-doing, the active life is the best life both for the whole city collectively and for each man individually. But

the active life is not necessarily active in relation to other men, as some people think, nor are only those processes of thought active that are pursued for the sake of the objects that result from action, but far more those speculations and thoughts that have their end in themselves and are pursued for their own sake; for the end is to do well, and therefore is a certain form of action.

LS: Namely, doing [. . .]

Reader:

And even with actions done in relation to external objects we predicate action in the full sense chiefly of the master craftsmen who direct the action by their thoughts. Moreover with cities also, those that occupy an isolated situation and pursue a policy of isolation are not necessarily inactive; for city activities also can be sectional, since the sections of the city have many common relations with one another. And this is also possible similarly in the case of any individual human being; for otherwise God and the whole universe could hardly be well circumstanced, since they have no external activities by the side of their own private activities. (1325b14-29)

LS: Peculiar to them, internal. And now the conclusion.

Reader:

It is therefore manifest that the same life must be the best for both each human being individually and for cities and mankind generally.

LS: So Aristotle has saved this general proposition of the way of the best life for the individual which must be identical with the way of the best life for the city, but at this price. You see how wrong this view is to call Aristotle a “realist,” because this is not very “realistic.” Where do you find such a [. . .]? Perhaps in existence for a short while elsewhere.

What seems to follow from everything we have read is this: the philosophic or theoretical life is best for the *polis* too. Aristotle does not state it in so many words, but in that commentary by [. . .] Thomas, the man who completed Thomas’s fragmentary commentary on the *Politics*,^{xiii} there the conclusion is explicitly drawn: the philosophic life for the *polis*. But this leads of course to a very great difficulty: How can the *polis* philosophize? Plato, in the *Republic*, 494a, says—Socrates says—that a multitude should philosophize is altogether impossible. The *polis* is of course a multitude. If the city could philosophize, the philosophers would have to be a part of the *polis*, because not all citizens can be presumed to be [. . .]

Now when Aristotle enumerates the parts of the *polis* later on in this book, in today’s assignment, what does he say about the philosophers?

Student: It seems to me that the philosophers are subsumed by those oldest men who are going to take care of the religious practice.

^{xiii} Peter of Auvergne (1240–1304), French theologian and philosopher.

LS: The priests. That is a reasonable suggestion, but it will break down very soon because the priests are here defined as people who are no longer good for any other activity, and that is not Aristotle's view of the philosopher.

Student: That seems to be the difficulty. If we interpret the philosophers as being capable of rule according to Aristotle, then it seems to me his famous division between practical reason on the one hand, and speculative reason on the other disappears. It seems to me in Aristotle that the two do not exercise themselves together.

LS: That is not simply true. Think of Aristotle having his school in Athens, and having all kinds of relations with all kinds of people. He must eat and drink, see his physician, and these are all practical things.

Same Student: But I mean in the sense [that] if Aristotle were to be the ruler of Athens, [he] would not in the general course of affairs have sufficient time . . .

LS: That is true. In other words, there will be practical activity on the part of the philosopher, but not the political, because that is too time-consuming.

As to this question of philosophers and priests, there is a statement on the subject in Plato, and that occurs in the dialogue called the *Timaeus*, the sequel to the *Republic*. Some individual, having listened to the discussions in the *Republic*, says he has been reminded by these discussions of what he had heard from his grandfather who had heard it from his grandfather about Egypt, the country belonging to most ancient antiquity. In Egypt, they had the same order: they had a different class of moneymakers, and another class of soldiers, and then of the priests.^{xiv} You see, this man took it for granted that you can replace the philosophizers by the priests. But that was Critias; it was not Socrates. Now let us turn to 1325b33. Here the second part of the inquiry made in book 7 begins.

Reader:

And as we have prepared the way by this prefatory discussion of the subject, and have previously studied all the other forms of regime, the starting point for the remainder of our subject is first to specify the nature of the conditions that are necessary in the case of the city that is to be constituted in the^{xv} best manner. (1325b33-37)

LS: The conditions: the Greek word is again *hypothesesis*: hypotheses, assumptions.

Reader:

For the best constitution, regime, cannot be realized without suitable equipment. We must therefore posit as granted in advance a number of as it were, ideal—

LS: We must assume [. . .] as if praying. We pray, pray for something—praying or wishing; it's the same word, although something which we cannot procure, that's the key point. And

^{xiv} Plato, *Timaeus* 24a–b, 26c–d.

^{xv} The reader omits “ideally” here.

therefore what you cannot procure by your own activity, you can wish or pray for it, and therefore wishing and praying can have the same meaning.

Reader:

a number of wishable^{xvi} conditions, although none of these must be actually impossible. I mean for instance in reference to number of citizens and territory. All other craftsmen, for example a weaver or a shipwright, have to be supplied with their material in a condition suitable for their trade, for the better this material has been prepared, the finer is bound to be the product of their craft; so also the statesman and the lawgiver ought to be furnished with their proper material in a suitable condition. (1325b37-1326a4)

LS: The word material: the word used is *hylē*, matter. So just as a carpenter must have suitable matter for making a table, and a shoemaker; in a similar way the political man or lawgiver must have suitable matter if he is to build up a perfect regime, just as in the case of the carpenter, the table or the house, and the shoemaker, the shoe. To that extent, the art of the legislator is a productive art like the other productive arts.

It is necessary, Aristotle says, [that] one must give the man who speaks about the perfect regime—one must give him the freedom to wish for the best, because if the material is from the very beginning inadequate, we cannot expect him to produce something perfect. But he must not wish something impossible, meaning intrinsically impossible. Therefore, for example, in Plato's *Republic*, with this discussion of communism and women and children and equality of the two sexes, two questions arise: Is it intrinsically choiceworthy or desirable; and is it possible?^{xvii} They are two different questions. In modern times, there emerged a kind of political doctrine in which the question of possibility was dropped. Generally speaking, when pictures of a future society in modern times arise, the skeptical people, the more or less conservative people, say it is not possible; and the people who have great faith in a common future would like to get rid of the possibility question. Now the theoretical foundation for this was laid by one of the greatest modern thinkers, by Kant. When Kant speaks, for example, of perpetual peace or other future developments which he regarded as desirable, the question of possibility does not become an independent question for this reason: because the best order of society is a moral demand. And a moral demand as such precludes the question of possibility, the principle being, as Kant puts it, "Thou canst because thou oughtst": because it is your duty, the question of possibility doesn't arise.^{xviii} Taken also from private life, someone says he cannot overcome his urges, and the answer is: You can overcome them, otherwise it would not be expected of you that you do overcome them. The same would also be true politically.

Now let us go on from here. Here comes a very long discussion of which we will read only a small part dealing with the optimum size of the *polis*, a question which is now again in the foreground of discussion because of the famous urban problems. We read only 1326b11.

^{xvi} Rackham has "ideal."

^{xvii} Plato, *Republic* 466d.

^{xviii} Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 163–4 (5:30) and 338 (8:370).

Reader:

The lowest limit for the existence of the city is when it consists of a population which reaches the minimum number that is self-sufficient for the purpose of living the good life after the manner of a political community. It is possible also for one that exceeds this one in number to be a greater city, but, as we said, this possibility of increase is not without limit, and what the limit of the city's expansion is can easily be seen from practical considerations—

LS: "From the facts" is more literal.

Reader:

The activities of the city are those of the rulers and these of the persons ruled, and the work of a ruler is to direct the administration and to judge lawsuits—

LS: "Command and judgment" would be more literal.

Reader:

but in order to decide questions of justice and in order to distribute the offices according to merit it is necessary for the citizens to know each other's personal characters, since where this does not happen to be the case the business of electing officials and trying lawsuits is bound to go badly; haphazard decision is unjust in both matters, and this must obviously prevail in an excessively numerous community. (1326b11-22)

LS: That is the most important consideration. So there is an upper limit to the size of the city. One can perhaps state what Aristotle means by this upper limit as follows. The city has the right size if everyone knows not everybody else in the city—that would be a village. But if everybody knows an acquaintance of everybody else, so that they have at least a way of finding out about a candidate in a direct way and not be dependent upon the means of mouth communication—where a certain technique is needed, so the man who might be the best man simply is not photogenic [would] for this reason¹¹ have no chance of being elected. We have examples of [this in] our time.

Then there come other considerations worth reading, but we cannot take the time for that—about the size of the territory, the question of whether and to what extent proximity to the sea is [. . .] and then the question of the navy. This question of the navy is connected with the question of imperialism or hegemony, as Aristotle makes clear. Now we turn to 1327b16.

Reader:

Let such then be our conclusions about the territories and harbors of cities and the sea and about naval forces. About the citizen population, we said before what is its proper limit of numbers. Let us now speak of what ought to be the citizens' natural character. Now this one might almost discern by looking at the famous cities of Greece—

LS: So in other words, part of that [. . .] that matter which the legislator must have if he is to construct a perfect regime is the human matter; or in present-day language, the human material put at his disposal. That is the question to which he turns now.

Reader:

and by observing how the whole inhabited world is divided up among the nations. The nations inhabiting the cold places and those of Europe are full of spirit but somewhat deficient in intelligence and skill, so that they continue comparatively free, but lacking in political organization and capacity to rule their neighbors. The peoples of Asia on the other hand are intelligent and skillful in temperament, but lack spirit, so that they are in continuous subjection and slavery. But the Greek race participates in both characters, just as it occupies the middle position geographically, for it is both spirited and intelligent; hence it continues to be free and to have very good political institutions, and to be capable of ruling all mankind if it attains political^{xix} unity. The same diversity also exists among the Greek races compared with one another— (1327b16-34)

LS: This is the passage which I had in mind when I spoke on an earlier occasion about the *polis* as *polis* occupying the center or mean between two faulty extremes—the tribe (especially in northern Greece and the Balkan countries), and the Eastern Empire—the one characterized by freedom without civilization, and the other characterized by civilization without political freedom. And the *polis* is by its nature capable of combining both. That is surely the Aristotelian view.

He had mentioned here in Greek the word *thymos*, spiritedness, which these warlike barbarians of northern Greece or beyond there had, and this he takes up in the sequel where you left off. Will you continue there?

Reader:

The same diversity also exists among the Greek races compared with one another: some have a one-sided nature, others are happily blended in regard to both these capacities. It is clear therefore that people who are to be easily guided to virtue by the lawgiver must be both intellectual and spirited in their nature. For as to what is said by certain persons about the character that should belong to their Guardians— they should be affectionate toward their friends but fierce toward strangers—it is spirit that causes affectionateness, for spirit is the capacity of the soul whereby we love. A sign of this is that spirit is more aroused against associates and friends than against strangers, when it thinks itself slighted. Therefore Archilochus for instance, when reproaching his friends, appropriately apostrophizes his spirit: ‘For ’tis my friends that make me choke with rage.’ Moreover it is from this faculty that power to command and love of freedom are in all cases derived; for spirit is a commanding and indomitable element. But it is a mistake to describe the Guardians as cruel towards strangers; it is not right to be cruel towards anybody, and men of great-souled nature are not fierce except to wrongdoers. (1327b34-1328a10)

LS: This is obviously a critique of what Plato says in the *Republic* about the guardians: the guardians must be spirited. Aristotle accepts this up to a point. The desirable population of a perfect regime must be spirited men; if they are not, they will be prepared and willing to accept slavery, and so they must have that in man which makes it impossible for him to live as a slave, to live without freedom. That is the spirit, a special power of the soul.

^{xix} Rackham has “constitutional.”

Now what Plato said about the spirit led Aristotle later on and beyond to a distinction between the two kinds of the [. . .] soul, the [. . .] or desire, and the irascible, that which has to do with anger. The distinction here in this later view is very simple. The desiring is that part by which we strive for objects of desire on all levels, from an apple up to the highest. But the irascible comes in when our striving for the primary objects of desire is impeded by some resistance and we get angry. This is the traditional distinction, post-Platonic distinction. In Plato the distinction has a different character, because Plato asserts that the *thymos*, the spiritedness, is higher than all kinds of desire, and that leads to great difficulties which I cannot now discuss.

The main point is that Aristotle takes issue with what Plato says in the *Republic*, that the guardians must be nasty to strangers and friendly to acquaintances. And Socrates puts this into the [. . .] form, saying that the guardians have the character of dogs: dogs are nice to¹² [friends] and nasty to a stranger. He draws the conclusion that the dogs are lovers of knowledge, because they make the distinction between desirable and undesirable human beings with a view to their true knowledge. So this nastiness Aristotle in his nice way opposed to all extremisms—Plato is not opposed to all extremisms—and what I call the Jane Austen quality which he has, that goes too far. It is all right if they are indignant against evil doers and then hit them hard, but that is of course not nastiness in the way in which Plato meant it.

In the sequel, then, Aristotle takes up the question of the parts of the city, and introducing it with a somewhat lengthy theoretical introduction for which we have no time now. Let us rather read the enumeration of the parts of the city itself which begins in 1328b2. Aristotle had made a distinction between the parts of the city proper and the conditions of the city without which a city could not be. Now the conditions are always lower in rank than the condition, or the state of which the conditions are [conditions].

Reader:

We must also further consider how many there are of these things referred to that are indispensable for the existence of a city; for among them will be the things which we pronounce to be parts of the city, owing to which their presence is essential. We must therefore consider the list of occupations a city requires: for from these it will appear what the indispensable classes are. First then a state must have a supply of food; secondly, handicrafts (since life needs many tools); third, arms (since the members of the association must necessarily possess arms, both to use among themselves and for purposes of government, in cases of insubordination, and to employ against those who try to molest them from without); also a certain supply of money, in order that they may have enough both for their internal needs and for requirements of war; fifth, a primary need, the service of religion, termed a priesthood; and sixth in number and most necessary of all, a provision for deciding questions of interests and of rights between the citizens. These, then, are the occupations that virtually every city requires. (1328b2-15)

LS: In order, there are six parts; and the most striking is the fifth, of which he says (that is not well translated): “the fifth and also the first, the care regarding the divine, that care which they

call priesthood.”^{xx} The sixth is the highest and the fifth is the second highest, but then he corrects that and says: fifth and first. Now first we find the most obvious and massive needed thing, namely, food. So would the care for the gods be more necessary even than food? Or does this refer to the rank of this part of the *polis*, that it is in ascending order, that it is not so high as the fifth should be but rather at the beginning of the order? At any rate, the statement about the priesthood is ambiguous because of the ascending character of the order. This passage one has to take into consideration in order to see what I have said at the beginning of this course. When Aristotle says that the city is natural, he means also—although that is there only implicit—that the city is not holy, as it is in Homer or as in the practice of the cities in Aristotle’s time, but natural.

Now in the sequel in b24, Aristotle excludes the two lowest, the food producers and the artisans, from citizenship on the grounds of which we have already read before. These people do not have the leisure for the higher human activities. Who then will be the citizens? And the answer: the men carrying heavy arms must belong to the citizen body, because otherwise the whole regime won’t have any prospect of survival if the armed men are not a part of it. Other considerations lead to the final view, that the regime must be in the hand of the fighters, the wealthy, and of those capable to deliberate properly. There is a certain difficulty [as to] how one can reconcile them. That is discussed in 1329a2; we cannot read the whole thing, but it is based on nature. The same men who in their youth will be the warriors will in their mature age be the deliberators. The distinction which nature makes between a greater willingness to fight and a greater aptitude to fight in an earlier age, and greater capacity for reflection at a later stage, this makes possible the solution of this difficulty.

Then he makes clear that the farmers who do the hard work of the farm—not the gentlemen farmers [but] the hands, in other words—will have to be slaves. He doesn’t say anything about the craftsmen, whether they also should be slaves. But at any rate, the farmers would be the large volume of the population which could raise claims to participation in citizenship, and that problem is solved by having only the slave population for this purpose. So one can say with a slight exaggeration that Aristotle’s best regime solves the fundamental problem of politics as he saw it by abolishing the *demos*. And therefore this difficulty which we discussed last time cannot arise, that the gentlemen will be forced to give an account of their doings to those who are their inferiors—which would be against nature, that the higher should give an account of itself to the lower.

The[re is a] difficulty into which Aristotle gets despite the ingenious character of his conceit, as we will see later when he discusses the problem of the slaves in the perfect regime. Let us read only 1329a27. That is more or less a conclusion of our section today.

Reader:

There remains of the list enumerated the class of priests; and the position of this class also is manifest. Priests must be appointed neither from the tillers of the soil nor from the artisans, for it is seemly that the gods should be worshipped by citizens; and since the citizen body is divided into two parts, the military class and the councillor class, and as it is seemly that those who have relinquished these duties owing to age should render to the

^{xx} Strauss’s translation.

gods their due worship and should spend their retirement in their service, it is to these that the priestly offices should be assigned. (1329a27-33)

LS: So you see nature in her kindness and wisdom has provided also for this part of the city: the younger ones are the fighters, the middle-aged ones are the deliberators or judges, and the old ones are the priests. What more can you demand of a city according to nature? That confirms, of course, our interpretation of the fifth and first in the enumeration.

Is there any point which you wish to take up?

Student: It is not clear that this is the most complete [. . .] which he has presented, in terms of six classes, because it simply is not philosophic.

LS: What is unphilosophic about it?

Same Student: It is certainly not corrupted by lower influences, but on the other hand, there is no explicit guarantee of higher influences.

LS: The only guarantee which can be given by the legislator is here. The decisive point is of course ultimately again nature. If you mean to say there is no guarantee that some members of the society will philosophize [. . .] true, but Aristotle would say that you can't do anything about that. Philosophy transcends the *polis*, but on the other hand it is possible only within the *polis*. But there is no guarantee that the *polis* as *polis* will make possible philosophy. That is an insoluble question. If you say Aristotle's schema is not perfect because—apart from his suggestions regarding the exclusion of the lower classes from citizenship—because there is no need for priests, then the question would be: Would Aristotle regard a completely secularized society as possible? And the answer would have to be no. If there is to be, then, what now would be called a state religion, there must be priests. They need priests. That is inevitable, and then of course it becomes necessary, in order that divine worship has a necessary respectability, that it be in the hands of the most respected citizens; and that would be the old men who have devoted themselves in their youth to the wars and in their middle age to ruling. I think it is an elegant solution.

Session 15: November 27, 1967
Book 7, chapters 10–17

Leo Strauss: You noted there certain defects of Aristotle. Do you believe that Aristotle was conscious of them or not?ⁱ

Student: I think there's a disjunction between his theoretical state and what he sees as the practical difficulties in other people's states. He ignores them in book 7.

LS: Was he aware of the defects of what you now call the theoretical state?

Same Student: I think he was intelligent enough to be.

LS: Then the question is: Why did he present such a defective scheme? Why did he have the impudence, if one can use such a harsh word, to present something that he regarded as more or less absurd? We fall, as it were, for that. Can this have a serious purpose?

Same Student: The only conclusion I can come to is that the practical things can only be conditionally good; and this is the best possible, so this is the mean.

LS: And the best is not good enough. And what is the practical conclusion from that?

Same Student: There is no such a state.

LS: But that doesn't give us any direction. Is there no alternative?

Same Student: At the very least one can say that it points to the fact that there is a tension between the philosophy of theoretical wisdom and [. . .]

LS: All right. That is somewhat clearer. But what is the practical conclusion to be drawn from the defectiveness of the best regime one could figure out?

Same Student: That the political cannot exist simply for the sake of theoretical wisdom.

LS: That is elementary. We know that most people have worries other than the theoretical life, and they form the *polis*.

Same Student: Not to burn down any cities for the sake of a new order. He wouldn't like it.

LS: That is a sound political conclusion. Aristotle is aiming at more, I believe. If the political life and the philosophical life are the alternatives, and if the political life is shown to lead in the best possible case to something problematic, then there is no hope for man who wants to live consistently except to turn to the theoretical life. Let us read a few points. 1329a40.

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

Reader:

And that it is proper for the city to be divided up into castes and for the military class to be distinct from that of the tillers of the soil does not seem to be a discovery of political philosophers of today.

LS: You see there is another reference here, although not quite explicitly, to political philosophy. The term occurs very rarely in Aristotle, those who philosophize, who speak of wisdom regarding regimes. Now let us continue, in b22.

Reader:

It is from this country that the system of common meals has its origin, while the division of the citizen body by hereditary caste came from Egypt, for the reign of Sesostrius long antedates that of Minos. We may almost take it therefore that all other political devices also have been discovered repeatedly, or rather an infinite number of times over, in the lapse of ages; for the discoveries of a necessary kind are probably taught by need itself, and when the necessities have been provided it is reasonable that things contributing to refinement and luxury should find their development; so we must assume that this is the way with political institutions also. The antiquity of all of them is indicated by the history of Egypt; for the Egyptians are reputed to be the oldest of nations, for they have always had laws and a political system. Hence we should use the results of previous discovery when adequate, while endeavoring to investigate matters hitherto passed over. (1329b22-35)

LS: Now we omitted here a very learned interlude because it is of no interest to us. This kind of thing of course never happens in Plato. When Plato makes a reference to some outlandish tribe, then it has always a meaning, which in some cases we are not able to find out; but in Aristotle it is only like an antiquarian scholar of old times, and in particular of our age: Aristotle cannot be accused of wishing to display his learning—to drop names, so to speak. That of course is out of the question. He has some meaning that this is a very common thing, but leave it at that.

The main point here is that everything has been invented before; as a matter of fact, infinitely over. Now what does this imply? Infinitely over? For example, has the steam engine been invented infinitely over? Perhaps another man who didn't have the good luck of James Watt, but surely not infinitely over. What does he mean by that? It is very simple. We have discussed it more than once in this class.

Student: Since the world is eternal, there have been periods of development which have paralleled the present cycle, and due to the inevitable natural collapse . . .

LS: So there are cataclysms from time to time, and then life begins from scratch and leads then to the higher development of civilization, as we will call it; and then there will eventually be a decline. It is a consequence of his premise that the visible world is eternal. The visible world—not matter, but formed matter.

Now regarding the present [. . .] or time, there of course it happens only once; at least there is no necessity of its happening more than once. The most ancient antiquity in our present dispensation is Egypt, but in Egypt you also have the distinction between the fighters and the peasants. But we know something else about Egypt, not from Aristotle here, but from the beginning of Plato's *Timaeus*—I think I referred to it last time: the rule of priests, the importance of the priestly thought. In the context of the *Timaeus* of Plato, that means there is not philosophy in Egypt. This indicates what Aristotle here alludes to, that while many things have been sufficiently discovered already, yet there are some things still to be invented. If you will read the last sentence.

Reader:

Hence we should use the results of previous discovery when adequate, while endeavoring to investigate matters hitherto passed over. (1329b34-35)

LS: So in other words, there are some things passed over, neglected. That is the reason why Aristotle must write a book on the best regime, because no regime available either in fact or in blueprint is sufficient. We have this reply in book 7 and 8 especially. Go on where you left off.

Reader:

It has been stated before that the land ought to be owned by those who possess arms and those who share the rights of the *polis*—ⁱⁱ

LS: “Arms” means always armor, and that means to be of some wealth. This is the regime called *politeia*, where every hoplite is a good citizen. One can therefore say *politeia*, in the sense of one special regime, is equal to *hopliteia*, if one may call [it by] that term.

Reader:

and why the cultivators ought to be a different caste from these, and what is the proper extent and conformation of the country. We have now to discuss first the allotment of the land, and the proper class and character of its tillers; since we advocate not common ownership of land, as some have done, but community in it brought about by a friendly way by the use of it, and we hold that no citizen should be ill supplied with means of subsistence. (1329b36-1330a2)

LS: There is here some reference to somebody else: Plato. One must not go so far, of course, as some interpreter[s], especially of the nineteenth century, who always tried to look for a dig at somebody else. For example, Plato in the *Laws* said Cyrus has a bad education:ⁱⁱⁱ a dig at Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, just as if Plato and Aristotle and Xenophon were professors at various neighboring small German universities.

The question of the status of the cultivators of the soil is not yet answered. Yes?

Reader:

As to common meals, all agree that this is an institution advantageous for well-organized cities to possess; our own reasons for sharing this view we will state later. But the common meals

ⁱⁱ Rackham has “constitution,” but the Greek is *politeia*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Laws* 694c.

must be shared by all the citizens, and it is not easy for the poor to contribute their assessed share from their private means and also to maintain their household as well. (1330a3-7)

LS: Now is that not interesting? There will be poor even among the ruling class. This is deplorable, but how does it come about? What would you think?

Student: Spendthrifts. Crop failures.

LS: That you could say; bad character, black sheep. But crop failures and—

Student: Overbreeding.

LS: Surely. In other words, fertility of marriage, and fertility of the soil.

Reader:

And moreover the expenses connected with religion, piety,^{iv} are the common concern of the—

LS: Gods. There is no Greek word for religion.

Reader:

the gods^v are the common concern of the whole city. It is necessary therefore for the land to be divided in two parts, of which one must be common and the other the private property of individuals; and each of these two divisions must again be divided in two. Of the common land one portion should be assigned to the services of the gods, and the other to defray the cost of the common meals; of the land in private ownership one part should be the district near the frontiers, and another the district near the city, in order that two plots may be assigned to each citizen and all may have a share in both districts. This arrangement satisfies equity and justice, and also conduces to greater unanimity in facing border warfare. Where this system is not followed, one set of people is reckless about quarreling with the neighboring cities, and the other set are too cautious and neglect considerations of honor. (1330a11-20)

LS: In other words [. . .] in this country, the interventionist East Coast and the isolationist center of the country. Figure it out: everyone has land, the East Coast and in the Middle West, so there will be agreement regarding the fundamentals of foreign policy. You see how Aristotle figures out all possibilities. You will find later on, and you have read it, how he figures out the right thing regarding marriage. This is an important part of Aristotle and [one] also covered over by the fashionable reading in the light of Edmund Burke. Edmund Burke was opposed to this kind of figuring out, and had more trust in what would come out on the basis of experience, and tackling each difficulty as it arises and not having an overall concern. Aristotle is in this respect quite a rationalist, although not of the same kind as the rationalism of the eighteenth century. There are important differences, because they were fundamentally democratic, and Aristotle is not democratic; but as far as rationalism is concerned, there is no difference except that Aristotle

^{iv} The reader adds “piety.”

^v Rackham has “religion.”

believes that chance cannot be overcome, whereas in the eighteenth century they believed that chance could be overcome. That we must never forget. Is there any other point?

Student: Didn't he knock the world's first political scientist rather severely for having people responsible for both public and private land? The ruling class is going to be responsible for both.

LS: The ruling class, sure, but that doesn't mean¹ the ruling class collectively and individually. These are two different considerations.

Now another point which comes to mind is this. We have no time in this very quick, instant course on the [*Politics*]^{vi} to go into this detail, but Aristotle sometimes makes a critical remark against Plato or the Spartans, and then later on, when he presents his own teaching, he lays himself open to the same criticism. There is no contradiction in that. What he means by that is that they lay themselves open to that criticism, and they have not thought it through but it must be thought through. And the indication is that if it is thought through properly, one might very well find an argument in favor of this arrangement. This is not a simple contradiction. Let us now turn to line 25, regarding the cultivators of the soil.

Reader:

Those who are to cultivate the soil should best of all, if the best^{vii} system is to be stated—

LS: Literally, if it must be done according to wish or prayer.

Reader:

would be slaves, not drawn from people all of one tribe nor of a spirited character (for thus they would be both serviceable for their work and safe to abstain from insurrection), but as a second best they should be alien serfs of a similar nature. Of these laborers those in private employment must be among the private possessions of the owners of estates, and those working on the common land common property. How slaves should be employed, and why it is advantageous that all slaves have their freedom set before them as a reward, we will say later. (1330a25-33)

LS: This is a passage to which I have referred more than once. The fact that these slaves can become emancipated if they behave shows that they are not natural slaves in the strict sense, because a natural slave is a man who cannot take care of himself and then it would be a great cruelty to emancipate him. Therefore, these are conventional slaves, and that is of course a great difficulty to which [. . .] has referred. How can we get out of this difficulty? I mean, we must try our best and not give up and simply say: Well, Aristotle contradicts himself. That's his manner, and a man must always be true to his manner.

We read at least one passage in 1291a1 where Aristotle uses the expression “by nature slavish” of the city, of a certain kind of city which is unwilling to defend itself against its enemies.² Apart from the natural slaves in the strict sense, there are slavish people who³ prefer slavery to exposing their lives to fighting, and they cannot complain if they are enslaved. You know what Aristotle

^{vi} Strauss says “*Republic*,” evidently in error.

^{vii} Rackham has “ideal.”

said about the Asiatic as distinguished from the Thracian people in northern Greece, who are intelligent but slavish; otherwise, how would they accept the rule by the Persian king? Therefore, there is nothing wrong with that. Still, one can say in the strictest sense [that] they are conventional slaves, not natural slaves, and this has a very great implication. If the slaves are conventional, the free men too are conventional. Is that not necessarily the case? This may lead to the following conclusion: while man is by nature a social being—and this is hard to deny⁴—all institutions might be conventional. This of course would have to be qualified considerably to agree with what Aristotle says, because there would still be the natural superiority of the theoretical life as a standard, but otherwise the consequences would be very radical.

There is one passage to which we have not yet referred in this course which is very relevant to this question of the natural slave. The question of natural slavery can be said to be one special case of the comprehensive question of natural right. Aristotle doesn't speak in the *Politics* of natural right. He speaks about it in the *Ethics*, in book 5 somewhere, the section on justice.^{viii} The key point of his teaching regarding natural right is what?

Student: It bends slightly under circumstances.

LS: What does Aristotle explicitly say? All right, including natural right, is changeable.^{ix} This is not generally known, because the most powerful interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics* is that by Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Aquinas makes the distinction between the principles of natural right, which are unchangeable, and the conclusions—especially the very low, practical conclusions—which are changeable. This is a distinction which Aristotle does not make. So Aristotle must be taken to mean that all right is changeable, all natural right is changeable; and an example would be the distinction between natural and conventional slaves. What is by nature right is that only men [who are] by nature⁵ slaves should be treated as slaves, should be enslaved. If this conflicts with some other necessity, say, a necessity of the perfect *polis*, it might be necessary to change it. That is what Aristotle implies: that citizens of the best *polis* cannot be tillers of the soil, because then they would have to devote their time to their private affairs and they could not devote themselves sufficiently to the affairs of the city. Then you must have a *dēmos* of farmers, and this leads to great difficulties from Aristotle's point of view because then the higher, the gentleman, would have to give an account of their doings to the lower, which is against nature. So you must not have a *demos*; and then the only way out, it seems, at least the most elegant way out, is to have farming slaves.

Student: Are there not any fundamental underlying principles which would determine which natural right has precedence over the others?

LS: Yes. Now what would then be a principle which Aristotle never contradicts? I think one can say it is the supremacy of the theoretical life. If this is the major, and the minor would be there cannot be a theoretical life if there are no cities—how does Hobbes say? Where there were first flourishing cities, there philosophy first belongs. If we assume this as the minor, then it follows with another syllogism that the requirements of the city are directly based on the highest

^{viii} *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.7.

^{ix} *Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b29–30.

consideration, the need for philosophy; and therefore slavery must be accepted for the reason given. Indeed, there is some awkwardness in that, as Aristotle made quite clear by his honest discussion of natural slavery, but where is it written [that] he can say that the human problem[s] can be all elegantly solved? There might be sacrifices. There might not be such a simple harmony between all requirements.

Student: I'm trying to figure out the justification for unjust slavery, simply stated, in the best *polis*—in other words, if men were not by nature slaves, but slaves. Simply stated, this is not just.

LS: All right. Let us argue it out on this basis.

Same Student: Then the question becomes: Why is it [that] this *polis*, which is based in part upon an injustice, is better than a *polis* in which those who rule by nature are subordinate, pay heed to those who are slaves by nature, the people?

LS: You have not stated it clearly enough. In other words, is it not better to have this awkwardness, that the gentlemen have to give an account to the *dēmos*, rather than this gross unfairness, 'to enslave people who should not be enslaved? But Aristotle would say this, I'm afraid: In the case of the democracy, that the gentlemen would have to give an account to the *dēmos*, that the higher would have to go to the lower, the higher is done injustice too. There is an abominable injustice done. The injustice is done to the higher, whereas in the other case the injustice is done to the lower.

Same Student: Not necessarily, because there may be higher people who are by convention slaves.

LS: Yes, that is always possible. No one knew that better than Aristotle, when he says in the *Ethics*, in the discussion on friendship: One cannot be a friend with a slave as slave, but one can be a friend with him as a human being.^x Do you understand this consideration? In other words, there are people who are slaves, who deserve to be not only masters but even friends of people like Aristotle. That he knows. Plato himself, that is at least a traditional story, was sold into slavery on some occasion. Imagine what an inversion of the order! But of course he was ransomed very soon. But it is necessary to think this through and to see which are the premises not necessarily explicitly stated by Aristotle, or for that matter, by Plato, which go without saying for them—and which went without saying for many many centuries, not only in the West, but also in China or other places where you had such a situation regarding slavery. One must try to understand that.

We must not forget this point which I have said before, that the people who out of laziness, cowardice don't fight to defend their freedom cannot complain. That is also an important point.

Student: Then in the best *polis*, those who rule by nature will have to confront the struggle of those who are ruled by convention. In other words, that struggle is endemic to even the best

^x *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161b5–6 (8.11).

polis.

LS: All right. But it is mitigated by the fact, if you do not have a *dēmos* but have only slaves, *perioeci*^{xi} would be some kind of resident aliens. They were the *paganis*, living in the villages and doing the tilling of the soil. The term was used in Sparta for a certain part of the Spartan population.

Let us take it seriously what Aristotle says about the emancipation of slaves after some generations, and chance coming in all the time. There will necessarily come into being a *dēmos* without any citizen rights. Think of the plebeians in Rome originally. Then they will make trouble. They will make a [. . .]^{xii} and they will have to be used for war. There are not enough patricians to fight the wars and give them also a training in [. . .] back their masters. After a few generations, at the latest, Aristotle's best regime will be in poor trouble. There is no doubt about that. Ultimately, I think Aristotle would answer: I know that. You cannot expect a satisfactory solution or perfectly rational solution to the social problem. What the modern thinkers did, beginning from Hobbes, was to outline or elaborate in detail a rational solution. The question is, if we take an overall view: Did any of these rational societies proposed in modern times live up to being truly rational? This we have to consider. In other words, however funny things in politics or in these books may be, is there not a very important lesson for us, who are haunted by the hope for a perfectly rational, perfectly just society? There is something fundamentally questionable in that.

Student: This is a little bit off the point, but assuming that natural right is changeable and that certain necessities may force the giving up of certain natural rights, certainly we would see this from the point of view of a city: the rulers are the people in power, the people forming a constitution. They have to give up or decide to make some people slaves, and hence violate their natural rights. From the other point of view, say Plato, or some man who was made a slave conventionally but was still conscious enough, or say intelligent enough to realize that he shouldn't be a slave, and actively think about it, would Aristotle say that since the other people decided that this is the case where it [. . .] the city had changed the natural right, is there any obligation for the intelligent or philosophic individual to give up his natural right because the city demands it?

LS: Obligation is a dangerous word here, but prudence—not in the sense of cleverness, but in the Aristotelian sense of decency. What is prudence in such a situation? You must think in concrete terms. Plato, assuming he had been sent to Libya or some faraway place as a slave—and Plato was of course sure that he could do much better things than do the dirty work for this barbaric master there, but what would he have done? He would have had to learn the language, in the first place, and then he would have to explain to them that he belongs to a very

^{xi} *Perioikoi* “were the free inhabitants, being remnants of the original population, who enjoyed civil but not political liberty,” being neither Spartan citizens nor enslaved Helots; *paganis* refers to those living near the border (*Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed., Liddell and Scott [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980]; “*perioikos*,” “*peiganon*”).

^{xii} The inaudible phrase was originally transcribed as “succession to the holy mountain,” but this appears to be a mistranscription.

distinguished and wealthy family in Athens, and that he would write to these people that, say, ten times the amount they paid for buying him would be given to them. This man would conceivably have solved the problem. In other words, you cannot look at it in merely legal terms, because these people in Libya—I mean, I may do them injustice, but that's over the sea, and not Persia—these people might have had this view that a man taken prisoner, a foreigner taken prisoner is perfectly justly made a slave. He must thank his creator that he wasn't killed or sacrificed to some gods—which you know these institutions also existed, and not only in Libya, but also in Mexico and in other places.

Student: There seems to be a tension between the statement that the theoretical life, or philosophy, is the ultimate standard for changes in natural life, and Aristotle's statement, I believe in the *Ethics*, that says natural right is a part of political right. Natural right seems that one is closed to the theoretical life, and in another sense it seems open to it.

LS: What does he mean when he says natural right is a part of political right?

Same Student: I don't know.

LS: Yes, and that is very important: that doesn't mean of a subordinate kind but of the most comprehensive form. In other words, there is a right obtaining between spouses, a right obtaining between buyers and sellers, and the right obtaining between parents and children. These are all lower and smaller parts of rights. The most comprehensive, the most rich kind of⁷ [right], is the right obtaining among fellow citizens. If natural right as political right is changeable, the other kind of right will be at least as changeable. That is the only meaning of that. When I referred to the highest point, that was for this reason. If natural right is changeable, if we do not wish to leave it at an unqualified relativism, there must be something stable within the change.

If you look around in Aristotle's writings for that which is according to his views and never contradicted the highest, then the answer is the philosophic life. But we have to go on, and let us turn to 1330b32. We don't read what he says about the town planning and so on.

Reader:

Those who aver that cities which pretend to valor should not have [walls] hold too old-fashioned a view—and that though they see that the cities that indulge in that form of vanity are refuted by experience. It is true that against an evenly matched foe and one little superior in numbers it is not honorable to try to secure oneself by the strength of one's fortifications; but as it may possibly happen that the superior numbers of the attackers may be too much for the human valor of a small force, if the city is to survive and not to suffer disaster or insult, the securest fortifications of walls must be deemed to be the most warlike, particularly in view of the inventions— (1330b32-1331a1)

LS: This paragraph is interesting regarding Aristotle's belief in progress. That is too old-fashioned a view, namely, the Spartan view, that it is beneath the dignity of a city to be walled because they should be able to help themselves against enemies without them. In the

immediate context, let us read only 14 to 18.

Reader:

For just as the attackers of a city are concerned to study the means by which they can gain the advantage, so also for the defenders some devices have already been invented and others they must discover and think out; for people do not even start attempting to attack those who are well prepared.

LS: This is another fundamental difficulty in Aristotle's *Politics*, namely, the opposition to inventions. You remember the critique of Hippodamus in book 2, and here the encouragement of inventions. That is a very grave contradiction, because military inventions may lead to other inventions. They may even by themselves lead to change in the social and political order, and therefore endanger stability. There is very much more, but we have to draw a line somewhere, and let us turn to 1331b17.

Reader:

And temples must be distributed over the country, some dedicated to gods and some to heroes. But to linger at this point over the detailed statement and discussion of questions of this kind is waste of time.

LS: In other words, Aristotle sees a funny possibility. A too-detailed blueprint would be a bit absurd.

Reader:

not so much in the matter of theory but in that of practice; to lay down principles is a work of aspiration—

LS: That is impossible: "Speaking is the work of wishing,"^{xiii} speaking here in the sense of rational discourse, presenting the outline of a good society: that is a matter for wishing; of course, for reasonable wishing . . .

Reader:

Their realization is that the deed^{xiv} is a task of fortune.

LS: That depends on chance, yes. Quite a few times in this chapter there are references to the gods, and also to the heroes. I made a statistics of that. He speaks of gods and holy things more in books 7 and 8 than in the whole rest of the book. This is a fact of some importance, I believe. Now he turns gradually to the question of education—or rather, first of the citizen body. Read a bit of the immediate sequel.

Reader:

We must now discuss the regime itself, and ask what and of what character should be the components of the city that is to have felicity and good government. There are two things in

^{xiii} Strauss's translation.

^{xiv} The reader adds "that the deed."

which the welfare of all men consists: one of these is the correct establishment of the aim and end of their actions, the other the ascertainment of the actions leading to that end.

LS: What we would call the means.

Reader:

For the end proposed and the means adopted may be inconsistent with one another, as also they may be consistent. (1331b24-30)

LS: This is very important, but nonetheless immediately clear. Let us turn to line 39.

Reader:

It is clear that all men aim at the good life and at happiness, but though some possess the power to attain these things, some do not, owing to some factor of fortune or of nature.

LS: Fortune and nature are two different considerations. Some are born dumb and therefore cannot become truly happy; others have the necessary mental equipment but are unlucky, like the man gifted by nature and fit for the highest life who has become a slave.

May I mention in passing a passage which was misunderstood: a man's nature is never due to chance. In other words, you could say [that] whether he is rich or poor, that is due to chance, or a freeman or slave may be due to chance; but whether he is bright or dumb, that cannot be due to chance. The error is due to the fact that we always are inclined to think⁸ a soul, as it were, antedated his embodiment, and from this point of view one could say that all gifts which a man has are due to chance. The thought is alluded [to] somewhere by Plato.

Student: Anytime a person did not achieve his nature . . .

LS: This can be due to chance. It can also be due to his nature because he lacks certain natural qualities which enable him.

Same Student: But that would be his nature, though, wouldn't it?

LS: Oh, that happens. You are too young to know that. Young men sometimes promise very much and don't keep the promise although the opportunity for full development existed. Other people don't promise anything when they are young and then they ⁹awake, as it were, when they are thirty and even later. Opportunities are equal in both cases; therefore, that is nature. Some are slow to grow and others are quick. That is a natural distinction. Let us turn to 32a7.

Reader:

But the object before us is to discern the best regime, and this is the one under which a city will be best governed, and a city will be the best governed under the regime under which it has the most opportunity for happiness; it is therefore clear that we must know what happiness is. The view that we maintain (and this is the definition we laid down in the *Ethics*, if those discourses are of any value) is that happiness is the complete activity and

employment of virtue, and this not conditionally but absolutely. When I say ‘conditionally’ I refer to things necessary, by ‘absolutely’ I mean ‘nobly’: for instance, to take the case of just actions, just acts of vengeance and of punishment spring it is true from virtue, but are necessary, and have the quality of nobility only in a limited manner (since it would be preferable that neither individual nor city should have any need of such things), whereas actions aiming at honors and resources are the noblest actions absolutely; for the former class of acts consist in the removal of something evil, but actions of the latter kind are the opposite—they are the foundation and the generation of things good. The virtuous man will use even poverty, disease, and the other forms of bad fortune in a noble manner, but felicity consists in their opposites (for it is a definition established by our ethical discourses that the virtuous man is the man of such a character that because of his virtue things absolutely good are good for him, and it is therefore clear that his employment of these goods must also be virtuous and noble absolutely); hence men actually suppose that external goods are the cause of happiness, just as if they were to assign the cause of brilliantly fine performance of the harp to the instrument rather than to the skill. (1332a4-27)

LS: Now Aristotle recapitulates here in great abbreviation certain teachings of the *Ethics*, but of what part of the *Ethics*? The first book. The more sophisticated and detailed discussions given at the end of the *Ethics* he disregards here. The crucial addition at the end of the *Ethics* to what was said at the beginning is the distinction between the practical or political life and the theoretical life. We shall say therefore—and this applies to the whole work and especially to the seventh book, retroactively and prospectively—Aristotle abstracts in the *Politics* from the theoretical life, although he refers to it, as we have seen last time, but he refers to it in a very strange way. You remember that proportion I drew at the table.

The main point which Aristotle made here and which we know from the *Ethics*: happiness equal to virtue, or rather the practice of virtue plus equipment, the goods of fortune which you need. For example, you cannot be manifestly—and that is very important for Aristotle—manifestly munificent if you are not wealthy. A poor man can have the best intentions of being much more munificent than any rich man, but Aristotle says the intentions are [. . .] and therefore practically they do not exist, whereas in the case of the theoretical life there is also a need for some equipment. For example, people need books and papers, [or] at least someone who loans these things, and yet much less [than] for the life of a perfect gentleman. Let us turn to one important passage in 1332a32, or begin at 28.

Reader:

It is necessary on the basis of^{xv} what has been said that some goods must be forthcoming to start with and others must be provided by the legislator.

LS: In other words, just as a carpenter must have wood or whatever, the matter, and then he must have his art which transforms the matter, the same is true of the legislator.

Reader:

^{xv} Rackham has “It follows therefore from.”

Hence we pray that the organization of the city may be successful in securing those goods which are in the control of fortune (for that fortune does control external goods we may take as axiomatic); but when we come to the city's being virtuous, to secure this is not the function of fortune but of science and policy.

LS: Is this not¹⁰ [intelligible]? If someone would say he acts justly by accident, that means of course he doesn't act justly. If he says he is wealthy by good luck [. . .] even if he is a very clever man in making money, he would still need good luck in addition to his cleverness to be and remain wealthy.

Reader:

But then the virtue of the city is of course caused by the citizens who share in its government being virtuous; and in our city all the citizens share in the government. The point we have to consider therefore is, how does a man become virtuous? (1332a32-36)

LS: In our order, all citizens participate in the regime. In a sense, that is a tautological statement because in every regime the citizens partake in the regime. What Aristotle means by that is not the best expression one could find for what he says; Aristotle means by this there will be a considerable citizen body. That is the key point. Everyone except those who are foreigners, resident aliens, or slaves will participate in the regime.

This leads then to the question which he will discuss in the sequel—therefore, there can be no lifelong rulers. Let us assume we have a one thousand heads of families. These one thousand men cannot have ruling offices, and especially the highest ruling offices, at the same time. Therefore the question arises: Is there not something unnatural that among these one thousand gentlemen there may be some [so] superior by nature to the rest that they should not be lifelong rulers? His answer is no, and the reason given is because they are not clearly recognizable. If the rulers differed from the ruled as the gods differ both in body and soul from human beings, then it would be all right; no one would question that there are superior beings in bodily splendor and in mental superiority. But such a striking difference there would not be, even if there were a man like Aristotle among the one thousand gentlemen. There will be many people who, from some points of view and not totally negligible points of view, will be equal to Aristotle and perhaps even superior to him, and therefore they all must partake of the rule. Of course this question that men do not run around by nature with tags, superior men or inferior men, this of course leads to a great objection to Aristotle's aristocracy itself because it is not so visible that a man is meant to be a gentleman and not a shoemaker by nature. That depends very much on *tychē*. This kind of argument led to the modern doctrines which started from the equality of all, which must not be pressed but which simply or commonsensically meant this: Men do not run around with tags determining their natural equipment. What a man is or can do depends so much on social arrangements, on *nomos*, and on chance that the best rule of thumb is to treat all men as equal—I mean, in a political sense. That this can lead to difficulties of its own is another matter.

He comes then to the question of education, [13]32b41, toward becoming good men; that is to say towards being at the same time good citizens. We know from book 3 that good men are good citizens only if they are rulers in the best regime. They must therefore be trained toward the

ultimate goal of education, that they become rulers in the best regime in a good society. It is also clear that no one will be a ruler who will not have been ruled in turn. They must first be trained in being ruled, although that is only the primary law, but this is an important one.

Now let us turn to 1333a5.

Reader:

Government, as has been said in the first discourses, is of two sorts, one carried on for the sake of the ruler and the other for the sake of the subject; of these the former is what we call the rule of a master, the latter is the government of free men.

LS: Now he makes an aside. That aside we will want to read.

Reader:

But since we say that the goodness of the citizen and ruler are the same as that of the best man, and that the same person ought to become a subject first and a ruler afterwards, it will be important for the legislator to study how and by what courses of training good men are to be produced, and what is the end of the best life. (1335a11-15)

LS: Now what is that?

Reader:

But some of the commands differ not in the nature of the services commanded but in their object. Hence a number of what are thought to be menial services can be honorably performed even by free men in youth; since in regard to honor and dishonor actions do not differ so much in themselves as in their end and object.

LS: There are great difficulties, and people have assumed a lacuna here and all other kinds of difficulties, which I think is not true. What Aristotle means is this; it is an aside. The young ones have to learn to be ruled, although they are meant to be rulers eventually. In this training in being ruled, they may have to do quite a few things which are menial otherwise, but which are not menial in their case because in their case they have part of their training in gentlemanship. For example, what they do in the English public schools in the lower forms? What do they have to do in the higher forms? All kinds of low and degrading things.

Student: Blacking shoes.

LS: Yes, for example. These of course are not menial and degrading but a matter of honor for them. That is what Aristotle meant, and I think there is no necessity to assume [a] lacuna here.

In the sequel Aristotle speaks of the superiority of the theoretical discourse to the practical one. He points to the difference between the theoretical life and the practical life, without however speaking of the latter explicitly. Instead, he does this, and [it] corresponds to what we have observed last time: the question of the difference between the practical and the theoretical life is replaced by the difference between war and peace. Clearly the theoretical life belongs to the side

of peace, but study and understanding is not the only peaceful activity. But there is again this peculiar abstraction from the theoretical life which Aristotle practices in the *Politics*. The end of education is peace and leisure: the reasonable use of leisure rather than war and business, if business is the opposite of leisure.

He also speaks again of the objectives of war in 33b35 following. Then he comes to the question of education with a view to the highest, ultimate. Of course it must begin with the lowest, because we all are born as naked babies and this is the beginning of all education. It's a pity that we cannot read all of this, but let us turn to 35b12, when he speaks of pregnant women.

Reader:

And pregnant women also must take care of their bodies, not avoiding exercise nor adopting a low diet; this it is easy for the lawgiver to secure by ordering them to make a journey daily for the due worship of the deities whose office is the control of childbirth.

LS: You see here a political use of the gods, obviously. The women wouldn't do it if he would say: It's good for your health. But if it is your duty in order that you survive childbirth, then they will do it. Go on where you left off.

Reader:

As regards the mind, however, on the contrary it suits them to pass the time more indolently than as regards their bodies; for children before birth are evidently affected by the mother just as growing plants are by the earth. As to exposing or rearing the children born, let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared; but on the ground of number of children, if the regular customs hinder any of those born being exposed, there must be a limit fixed to the procreation of offspring, and if any people have a child as a result of intercourse in contravention of these regulations, abortion must be practiced on it before it has developed sensation and life; for the line between lawful and unlawful abortion will be marked by the fact of having sensation and being alive. (1335b12-26)

LS: The word used for lawful here is *hosion*, which has something to do with and which is in a certain contradistinction to the word *hieron*, to the sacred. It has itself the meaning, reference to divine law. Be that as it may, Aristotle accepts birth control without any hesitation. Read a bit further on where you left off.

Reader:

And since the beginning of the fit age for a man and for a woman, at which they are to begin their union, has been defined, let it also be decided for how long a time it is suitable for them to serve the city in the matter of producing children. For the offspring of too elderly parents, as those of too young ones, are born imperfect both in body and mind, and the children of those that have arrived at old age are weaklings. Therefore the period must be limited to correspond with the mental prime; and this in the case of most men is the age stated by some of the poets, who measure men's age by periods of seven years,—it is about the age of fifty. Therefore persons exceeding this age by four or five years must be discharged from the duty of producing children in the community, and for the rest of their

lives if they have intercourse it must be manifestly for the sake of health or for some other cause.^{xvi} (1335b27-38)

LS: Yes, and some similar amount in the next sentence, which deals with adultery, which is not according to the strictest morality. In the sequel, he speaks also about the question of censorship, namely, what kind of stories are to be told to little children; and of course he takes the view which prevailed in that time until a generation ago, that children should be protected against impressions for which they are too young.

One of the funniest things in this section was Aristotle's figuring out what the right time for marriage is, for men [on the one hand], and women on the other hand. Do you remember how he drew the line?

Reader: When a child grows up and he can take his father's place.

LS: Not quite. The cessation of fertility should coincide on both sides. This is the starting point, and therefore, going backwards, the men should be about thirty-five and the women should be about eighteen. He figured it out very well from his point of view, but there is naturally not the slightest consideration of whether they love one another. That is irrelevant. I had mentioned before Jane Austen, because sometimes I cannot help thinking of her when reading certain passages here, although less in Aristotle than in Xenophon. There is one difference for Jane Austen: that the future spouses should love one another is a moral requirement. That is saying something wrong morally, if they do not love one another, whereas for Aristotle and the whole older humanity, this was the least important consideration. I suppose the case of definite mutual repulsiveness is excluded, but even there custom and the time can do a lot. Is there any other point?

Student: What did Aquinas say about this section?

LS: He didn't write his commentary. The cleric who continued Aquinas's work simply rendered Aristotle's thoughts there. After all, he was paid for interpreting Aristotle's *Politics*, and that he did. Sure, this was incompatible with the Christian teaching. You mean regarding abortion? That goes without saying, but not Aristotle, you see.

Student: I believe there were certain periods in which abortion was justifiable up to the point which they called crippled child.

LS: That is what Aristotle says. And you think that was accepted in Christianity?

Same Student: Yes, until the sixteenth century.

LS: We have here an authority in Christian theology.

Student: I think the nature of the debate turned on when the soul is conceived. Aquinas held the view that the soul came after [. . .] There were Christian theologians who debated that [. . .]

^{xvi} Rackham has "similar reason."

LS: In other words, they agreed fundamentally with Aristotle. But you seem to be wrong regarding the sixteenth century.

Session 16: November 29, 1967

Book 8, entire

Leo Strauss: You rightly pointed out that the discussion of education has as its goal not the highest human possibility, theoretical man, but the gentleman, to say nothing of the external incompleteness of book 8.ⁱ One point should be made clearer: the relation between leisure, business, and play. You used the Greek word for leisure, *scholē*—in Latin *schola* and from which we have our word school, but it had originally a somewhat more pleasant meaning than the word school does now. What is the relation between these three things?

Student: You can do it in various ways. One way would be in terms of the soul. *Scholē*, I think, is the highest development of the soul.

LS: Also that time of life for which we live.

Same Student: Occupation then is a means of living itself. It is a means of supporting oneself, usually.

LS: That activity which enables us to have leisure. The most noble of these activities is war. Generally speaking, there must be war so there will be peace and therefore leisure. What about play?

Same Student: Play is probably more closely connected to work.

LS: Not only probably, but certainly. In which way?

Same Student: It's an antidote, a relaxation.

LS: Yes. That is very important, because in our present discussion the distinction between play and leisure is lost, whereas for Aristotle it is crucial. There is one simple way to make intelligible to us modern people what Aristotle has in mind. There is a word in general usage which points to the difference, or pointed originally to the difference between play and leisure. That's the word holiday. Holiday in the original is holy day, and the idea being that it was not the time for sleeping or staying in bed all day, or for doing some other merely recreational things, but for the highest activity, namely, praying. And resting from labor, but not merely in order to save strength for the coming week but something higher.

Student: I have a question on the interrelationship between business and play, on the relation of leisure to the city. Is leisure anything more than a time for philosophy? Does it have a place in civic life?

LS: What would the perfect gentlemen do? They are not philosophers. What would they do in their leisure time? I mean, not merely in the time where they relax. That is subordinate to their

ⁱ Strauss responds to a student's paper, read at the beginning of the session. The reading was not recorded.

working. But what would they do in their leisure time?

Same Student: Take part in politics.

LS: That could be also business. Business is not only war or taking care of their farms. In one of the Aristophanean comedies there is a discussion, if you can call that a discussion in a comedy, at least a presentation¹ of what is the proper thing to do, say, at a banquet, for example. What kinds of stories?² Of course in a comedy ridicule and name-dropping play a very great role: When I was present at the victory of X at Olympia, and while I was sitting on the right side . . . that is on a very low level, something which is neither relaxation nor, surely, work. So banquets would be such things, or talking, reminiscing, and listening to music, as we have seen in book 8, looking at statues, visiting with friends. There are many things which can be done apart from philosophizing.

Student: If political action would then be business, then political action is for the sake of banquets?

LS: Yes. Business is for the sake of leisure. Have you heard the expression [. . .] Well, that means work, work, work. That is of course wholly alien not only to Aristotle but to most people of former times. There is always something higher than work.

Same Student: I understand that. What I was saying was that [when] the gentleman here said gentlemen's leisure time would be to partake in politics, you said no, because politics would be like work. What they would do is participate in banquets and talk.

LS: Let's say [that] in your discussions with friends about the political work of the city it may be in between, but the political activity proper is work. In order to see that, you only have to read the end of book 10 of the *Ethics*, where it is made clear how much is work.ⁱⁱ Surely you can say work in the [. . .] sense, taking care of one's farm so that a means of subsistence, of comfortable self-preservation, is available, is in the service of political activity. That is surely true, but the political activity itself is business.

Take an example from our way of life, at least from people like myself. We are supposed to teach and do what they call research, but there is also a certain amount of administrative work. The administrative work, faculty meetings and such, clearly belongs to business, whereas teaching and research can participate of leisure—I mean, if it is fun, to use a crude word. Administration and politics belong very much together. That a man like Pericles probably enjoyed himself more when he gave his speech like the funeral speech than in any leisure activity I do not deny, but this is a secondary although important complication because Pericles, being only a political and practical man—that's what Aristotle, I fear, would say—would not be the best judge of what is the highest human activity.

Student: I'm interested in the relationship between leisure and business. Leisure seems to be the fulfillment of man's nature and business seems to be the necessary, that which is necessary

ⁱⁱ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b6–18.

for this fulfillment. It seems to me that these were the only variables: doing the necessary to allow for the fulfillment of the natural. Therefore, I don't see why the issue of play is even considered.

LS: Because people at that time seem to have mistaken play and leisure. Our present-day leisure time discussions are based on this mistake, and Aristotle had to make clear that play as relaxation is lower than work because it serves only the purpose of accumulating again power for doing what is work. So play is for the sake of work; work itself is for the sake of leisure. That is the simple schema whether you admit it or not, but that is what Aristotle asserts. As you say, fulfillment of one's nature. One must not forget that from Aristotle's point of view, the true fulfillment of one's nature is possible only in and through speculation, philosophy, science, whatever.

Same Student: Play permits the performance of the necessary. It is necessary to necessary . . .

LS: What is necessary means always [that] it is necessary for something else. There are other things which are not necessary for something else but ends in themselves, and they are called noble or beautiful in contradistinction to [necessary].

Same Student: Going backwards—we could keep going backwards ad infinitum—there might be something necessary for play.

LS: Why not? But this is easy to understand. For example, in the case of hay, there must be people who make bales of hay. For them that is work. What else do you mean?

Same Student: It seems then that play would go under the heading of business.

LS: No, because the production of the things necessary for play is business, but playing itself is not business. Think of work as in a ball factory: playing football on the one hand, and then they produce footballs. There is a clear division and great distinction between the two activities.

Same Student: I wonder, though, whether there isn't a difference between the teaching in the *Ethics*, in book 10, and the implied teaching in book 7 in the *Politics* with respect to the dignity of political activity. While it might be true that book 10 does imply that politics is subordinate to what we would call nonspeculative leisure activity, or not primarily speculative leisure activity, book 7 seems to imply quite clearly that the choice that a man usually has as far as the so-called active life is concerned is between speculation on the one hand and politics on the other, a distinction which comes from Plato, especially in the *Gorgias*.

LS: The point which I can make now is simply this. The discussion of this question in books 7 and 8 of the *Politics* is on a lower level deliberately than the discussion in the *Ethics*, especially in book 10 of the *Ethics*. Aristotle abstracts, as I call it, in the last books of the *Politics* as much as possible from the philosophical or theoretical life. He cannot completely disregard it, otherwise he couldn't make anything clear, but he speaks in a very subdued way. I think that is the general line to take.

Student: It seems that Aristotle makes a pretty sharp distinction between play and true leisure, and that seems plausible if you think of going to the movies on the one hand, and [. . .] But I wonder about Plato, especially in the *Laws*, whether and if play and true leisure aren't somewhat closer to each other, and that the reason for that would be that he thinks of celebration as being somewhere between play and true leisure, i.e., between going to the movies and philosophizing.

LS: Going to the movies can be a very ambiguous thing. It can be play. But if you think of a movie critic, it is surely that; it can also be leisure, if you think of an intelligent sociologist who uses the observation of the movies for thinking reasonable thoughts about our society. That is perhaps a complicated example.

Same Student: Could it not be said that Plato in some cases seems to have higher regard for play than does Aristotle?

LS: I see your point; that is quite true. Why does Plato have such a deeper concern with play, a much deeper concern indeed than Aristotle?

Same Student: I was guessing that it might have something to do with his interest in celebration.

LS: No, but I don't believe that Plato was more pious than Aristotle. That is a very long question, but a very obvious answer on the basis of what Plato explicitly says is available.

Student: Aristotle was more convinced that life is a serious business.

LS: Oh, Plato also regarded that, unless you mean that the playthings are in the hands of the gods. But this Aristotle would also admit: that the word [. . .] meaning to lead a human life, the life of a human, is a term of depreciation in Aristotle. No, something very simple. Plato speaks about play with particular emphasis when he speaks of writing—writing, and that means of course especially the Platonic dialogues, which were particularly dear to Plato as his own work. Writings can never be serious. Aristotle never makes a remark such as that. Therefore, in other words, that activity which in a way is the highest of Plato, because what he could teach the men he knew is at least in quantitative terms incomparable to what he could teach men through his books. Even if we take the couple [of] hundred years which Plato believed his books would survive, cataclysm would put an end to them and Plato could never dream of us in 1967 reading Plato. The estimation of the seriousness of writings and the so-called ironical character of Plato—Aristotle has these ironies, but much less than Plato. This is a point which one should consider, but it would lead us far beyond this field of political philosophy, even of political science.

Since this is the last meeting of this course, I would like to bring up a few general questions on the proper occasion. First, one which has occurred to me as a kind of test as it were for what we have been doing. You must have heard the expression "elitism." Now let me put it

this way: Is Aristotle, namely, an elitist? How would you answer this question? You say yes. Is there anyone who says no?

Student: The notion that is implied by elitism seems to be substantially different from Aristotle's notion of aristocracy.

LS: All right, but in what respect?

Same Student: One is more concerned with moral excellence, while the other is more concerned with technical capabilities.

LS: There is something to that, but I believe it does not go quite as you say.

Student: I may be shooting in the dark, but I thought the elite is chosen from a wider class, like the unenlightened proletariat, and rules in their title of being understanding representatives of a broader group. They do not rule in virtue of their own excellence but as technically competent rulers.

LS: Yes, that is very important. However, the elitist would say every society is ruled by an elite, and Aristotle denies that. A democracy is not ruled by an elite in the Aristotelian sense. In other words, elitist doctrines are politically neutral because they apply equally to all societies, and Aristotle's doctrine is not politically neutral. So there is not, as it has been called by one of the leading theorists of elitism, there is no iron law of oligarchy according to Aristotle.ⁱⁱⁱ

Now someone would say today probably that such a thing as Athenian democracy, where the slaves were excluded, is a kind of oligarchy. But this is surely not the way in which Aristotle looked at it, because for him it was a matter of course that resident aliens would not be citizens. We can say that elitism is a tacitly democratic doctrine. It thinks the elite acts on behalf of the *demos*—whether elected according to a democratic doctrine or not elected according to a communist or fascist doctrine is here not relevant.

Aristotle takes all regimes seriously. By this I mean he takes them all on their word. A democracy says it is the rule of the *dēmos* for this and that reason, which we have seen in book 6. He accepts that. He doesn't go into psychoanalysis. He accepts this as they say it, and indeed he does not agree with it. This taking seriously of the difference in regimes finds its most extreme expression in the fact, if it is a fact, that the word "fatherland" never occurs in the *Politics*. Never. It does not have this emphatic meaning which it does in English. It is quite commonly used by other Greek writers, but by Aristotle himself rarely in the *Ethics*. But I have gone again over the text of the *Politics*; the indices are not sufficient and I have not found it. Fatherland, *patris* in Greek, is distinguished from the *polis* by the fact that it³ is more obviously an object of reverence than the *polis* as *polis*. *Patris*, just as the *polis* as *polis*, is indifferent at first glance to the difference of regimes. It is the same fatherland with the tombs of the

ⁱⁱⁱ German sociologist Robert Michels (1876–1936) first formulated the "iron law of oligarchy" in his 1911 book *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Heart's International Library Co., 1915).

ancestors whether the regime is oligarchic, democratic, tyrannical, or whatever.

This fact is connected with another fact which I believe I have not mentioned before. The expression “good citizen” has a twofold meaning. The first is discussed at great length in book 3. The good citizen is relative to the regime, so the good citizen in a democracy would be a bad citizen in an oligarchy. But there is also another meaning of good citizen, with which we are in a way more familiar, of which Aristotle does not speak in the *Politics* but in a more popular work called the *Athenian Constitution*. There he refers to a famous politician of the late fifth century, Theramenes, who was called the turncoat because he changed from one party to another, like Winston Churchill in our time.^{iv} This is not a desirable example. When there was a democracy he was a democrat, and when there was an oligarchy he was an oligarch; and Aristotle says there were people to defend him and say that he was really the good citizen because he tried to do the best for the city under every regime. This is another possibility, and one could call such a man the patriot: he is dedicated to his fatherland and the question of the regime is secondary to him. This is not Aristotle’s view of the matter, but he was aware of this. I thought I should mention it.

Student: In a certain sense there seems to be a tension in saying that the iron law of oligarchy is really [politically neutral]^v and supposed to apply to all situations, [and] on the other hand, the statement that it comes out of a peculiar democratic situation and assumes representation in the first place.

LS: You mean these modern doctrines? I believe that is clear, even the doctrine of [. . .] who cannot be and is not identical with [. . .] He does not speak of the *dēmos*; he speaks of society, but fundamentally that is the same, namely, every⁴ [society] is represented by its government.

Same Student: So oligarchy is not exactly a politically neutral concept.

LS: It is neutral because it applies according to [. . .] if you have an absolute monarchy, it is still an oligarchy which rules: the king and the clique, the courtiers around him. In a democracy, the men of the power structure, a tiny minority, and in an oligarchy of course it is obviously a small group of people. To that extent it is politically neutral. It would be as applicable to a democracy. Now let us turn to the beginning of book 8.

Reader:

Now nobody would dispute that the education of the young requires the special attention of the lawgiver. Indeed the neglect of this in cities is injurious to their regimes; for education ought to be adapted to the particular form of the regime, since the particular character belonging to each regime both guards the regime generally and originally establishes it—for instance the democratic spirit promotes democracy and the oligarchic spirit oligarchy; and a better spirit always produces a better regime. (1337a8-17)

LS: What Aristotle says here is what is the decisive importance of education for each regime. I

^{iv} *Athenian Constitution* sec. 28.

^v See reference to the politically neutral in the above discussion of the iron law of oligarchy.

think this thought is still easily intelligible. But why is it important? Because the most important thing in every regime is the *ēthos*, which in Greek means the character, the peculiar notion of character. In modern times, our time, they have spoken of the democratic personality, of the authoritarian or totalitarian personality.^{vi} Aristotle calls it *ēthos*. He had spoken of something similar but not identical earlier, in 1317a40 and b17 to 18. We cannot read this, in book 6, where he spoke of the hypotheses or of the originating principle of democracy. This is not identical with the *ēthos* but there is a connection between the two. Aristotle did not deign to elaborate that, and we would have to do that.

The word “spirit” used by [Rackham] in the translation is a kind of bridge between the two things. The hypothesis of democracy, we have learned, is freedom; and freedom has⁵ a complicated meaning as stated in book 6. There is a democratic *ēthos*. What links up these two things we would call the democratic spirit. Aristotle does not have such a word.

Student: I’d like to try to link up the idea of education with the idea of fatherland. Even though Aristotle might not mention the notion of fatherland, or today nation . . .

LS: The country would be closer.

Same Student: Country pride and feeling. Don’t you think implicit in the idea of the training of an *ēthos* of education, the idea of music as a tool for emotions, and that the development of the citizenry for the good state, the good citizen, the good man—all of this implicitly denotes a country’s feelings, a fatherland’s feelings?

LS: Certainly, but it is a fact, an empirically crude fact, that—I mean, I will be corrected if someone discovers the word [fatherland]. I haven’t seen it; Aristotle never uses the word in his book. There is a stupid explanation: Aristotle had left his fatherland when he was very young, somewhere in northern Greece, and therefore he had no feelings for a fatherland.

Same Student: What I’m trying to say is that book 8 is almost a scheme telling the legislator what to do in order to invent a feeling of fatherland in the people so that you can have a continuous state.

LS: That is a daring statement. Book 8 deals—this goes without saying and you did not contradict it—deals with education towards an aristocratic order, not a democratic order, but it surely doesn’t say anything about peculiarly patriotic feelings. In a way that goes without saying, but it is not a theme. What Aristotle is concerned with is in gymnastics, music, poetry, and so on, but not a special education in patriotism. That is so. This would go together with citizen life. There would be laws—there were such laws in Athens, for example, and Aristotle might have approved them, for all I know—that no one could be elected to any office, either by raising their hand or by lot, who had not proven that he had taken care of the graves of his forefathers. He might have spoken about it in the part of the *Politics* which is lost, but that’s all we can say. It is not an explicit thing.

^{vi} See session 7, n. iii.

Same Student: In gymnastics, for example, he speaks more of the hardening; modern American man speaks of the team spirit, which would be getting a little closer to that patriotic belonging together of the group. This agonistic is missing from his gymnastics, especially as team agonistic.

LS: Yes, and especially since agonistic thinking is said to be such an important part of the classical spirit. That is quite true. Plato speaks about this question of the fatherland in the *Republic* in book 3 or thereabouts when he speaks of the noble lies. All citizens must regard themselves as brothers, as sons of the same man; and there is some funny business going on about is it the man or is it the earth, because if it were the earth, there would have to be brothers of all men—all men would be brothers, sons of the earth.^{vii} That of course is incompatible with the *polis*, which has only a part of man. The inhabitants, the parts of this *polis*, are brothers. So this indicates perhaps a deeper reason why there is so much talk about this, and also the general view that earth belongs to the matter. The *polis* itself are the living beings, especially the male [. . .]

Student: It would seem that Aristotle is committed to that understanding, so it seems that men would be permitted various types of relationships and fashions of bestowing honors, rather than the sentimental attachment to the rolling mountains which I think connotes fatherland as fatherland.

LS: You can say sentiments would be subordinated or would be byproducts of other things. In the seventeenth century, psychologists made a tripartition of the activities of the soul which was new: thinking, willing, and feeling. Prior to that, there ruled the bipartition into thinking and willing. That is I think very characteristic. There is a certain modern end to this sort of feeling. We saw last time in the question of marriage no concern with the feelings of the spouses but only with how they think and how they behave. The feelings are somehow taken for granted; they will come. The right kind of feelings will accompany the right kind of actions, and the wrong kind of feelings wrong actions, and that is not a primary thing.

Now let us read a bit further on in the immediate sequel.

Reader:

Moreover in regard to all the faculties and crafts certain forms of preliminary education and training in their various operations are necessary, so that manifestly this is also requisite in regard to the actions of virtue. Inasmuch as the end for the whole city is one, it is manifest that education also must necessarily be one and the same for all and that the superintendence of this must be public, and not on private lines, in the way in which at present each man superintends the education of his own children, teaching them privately, and whatever branch of knowledge he sees fit. But matters of public interest ought to be under public supervision; at the same time also we ought not to think that any of the citizens belongs to himself, but that all belong to the city, for each is a part of the city, and it is natural for the superintendence of the several parts to have regard for the superintendence of the whole. And one might praise the Spartans in respect of this, for they

^{vii} *Republic* 414b ff.

pay the greatest attention to the training of their children, and conduct it on a public system. (1337a17-32)

LS: This praise of Sparta is of course qualified, as we have seen from the earlier criticism of Sparta, but he says on this point where they have public education common to all, he praises them. One point on which everything here depends is that the end of the *polis* must be one. This of course must be properly understood. Aristotle doesn't deny that there are *n* ends of the *polis*, but there is one and only one highest end which legitimates all others.

I read to you a passage by someone who is thought to be closest to Aristotle among modern thinkers, and that is Edmund Burke. He says the sound social political order must not be “formed upon a regular plan, or with any unity of design,” because such “systematical” proceedings, such “presumption in the wisdom of human contrivance,” would be incompatible with the highest possible degree of personal liberty. The state must pursue “the greatest variety of ends,” and must as little as possible “sacrifice any one of them to another, or to the whole.”^{viii} The state must be concerned with individuality, or have the highest possible regard for individual feeling and individual interests. That is surely radically different from Aristotle. There is no regard for individual feeling or individual interest as such except subordinately, pedagogically as it were, trying to lead everyone gently from the fear of his present feelings to something much nobler than anything individual, namely, the common end of man.

Some people think we should build up a kind of political theory which would be a hodgepodge of what the finest thinkers of the past and maybe of the present think, and that would be a kind of ideology to hold up against our common enemies. I am all in favor of presenting a united front to our common enemies, but I'm against the lack of intellectual honesty in this respect, at least in whatever our public officials have to do. We in our classrooms should insist on clarity. This great gulf between Aristotle and Burke is one of the important practical examples. That Aristotle and Locke or Hobbes are radically different, every child sees this at once, and this is not a matter of serious discussion. But in the case of Burke, it has frequently been asserted in our age and this must be resisted if we want to have clarity.

Now what Burke here stated in these lines which I read has become known in later times, especially in our time, by the name of pluralism. Now Aristotle is surely not a pluralist. Now if a pluralist is a man who admits that there are a variety of associations with a life of their own, then of course he is a pluralist. The family is not simply subject to the *polis*. What is understood by pluralism today, negatively stated, is that there is no hierarchy. There is a variety of ends or a variety of associations, and it is not possible to assert an order of rank among them.

So there are *n* ends of finding one's satisfaction, and they are all of equal value. As one of these men once put it in my presence: Whether you are an archaeologist or a garbage collector, it doesn't make any difference, because a man can find his satisfaction in collecting garbage—

^{viii} Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, in *The Works of Edmund Burke*, vol. 5, 253; *Edmund Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906), 18; *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, vol. 5, 254.

which I do not doubt. But this pluralism suffers from this defect because it is, if you look a bit more closely, another kind of monism. While the equality of all values or ends is asserted, there are privileged ends, namely, the ends inherent in pluralism itself, meaning in the first place tolerance, i.e., respect for every activity, a respect for diversity; and secondly an exhilaration stemming from the observation of diversity. They think that this is the sign of a broadminded human being, if he enjoys the diversity of manners, feelings, and so on.

This is parallel to something we have discussed earlier, namely, the difference between happiness in the modern sense of the word—everyone has his own notion of happiness—and the right to the pursuit of happiness. Precisely because of the infinite variety of views of happiness, everyone must be left to pursue happiness in his own way, but that means there is one universally valid right to the pursuit of happiness. I would venture to suggest—and in the last meeting one may take some liberties—that every pluralist in every field, theoretical or practical, or any human position, eventually is a monist. It doesn't mean a rigid one which allows for only one end without any subordinate ends, but eventually every position rests on a simple, single, ultimate assertion.

What Aristotle discusses then in the sequel—unfortunately we cannot read this all—is only the liberal arts, as they came to be called. The word liberal is in a way used by Aristotle. These future gentlemen are to have a liberal education and only a liberal education, not a technical education of any kind. There is in this remark, which we can read, in 1337b17. Do you have that?

Reader:

And even with the liberal sciences, although it is not illiberal to take part in some of them up to a point, to devote oneself to them too assiduously and carefully is liable to have the injurious results specified. Also it makes much difference what object one has in view in pursuit of study; if one follows it for the sake of oneself or one's friends, or on moral grounds, it is not illiberal, but the man who follows the same pursuit because of other people would often appear to be acting in a menial and servile manner. (1337b15-21)

LS: What Aristotle has in mind is explained by Thomas, to whose commentary I have referred more than once. He refers here to jurists and decisions. In other words, if they are done—if a man studies medicine and law for the reasons given here, then he is a gentleman and a liberal man. If he does it just in order to earn money or to have a high social position, status, then he is an illiberal man.

We discussed the question of business and play; we don't have to read that. The highest rank Aristotle assigns to music. We see that especially in 1338a9 to 30, but it becomes clear from the example that what he has in mind is the recitation of such things as Homer—I mean not merely Homer, but this is an example. It is very interesting that what Aristotle develops here is confirmed by passages from the *Odyssey* and not from the *Iliad*. This of course concerns the general assertion that the highest is leisure and peace in contradistinction to war.

Perhaps we turn to 1339a10, about music. Music has here the fuller sense, something which

is the work of the muses and includes frequently poetry.

Reader:

About music on the other hand we have previously raised some questions in the course of our argument, but it is well to take them up again and carry them further now, in order that this might give the key so to speak for the principles which one might advance in pronouncing about it. For it is not easy to say precisely what potency it possesses, nor yet for the sake of what object one should participate in it—whether for amusement and relaxation, as one indulges in sleep and deep drinking (for these in themselves are not serious pursuits but merely pleasant, and ‘relax our care,’ as Euripides says; owing to which people actually class music with them and employ all of these things, sleep, deep drinking and music, in the same way, and they also place dancing in the same class); or whether we ought rather to think that music tends in some degree to virtue (music being capable of producing a certain quality in character just as gymnastics are capable of producing a certain quality of body, music accustoming men to be able to rejoice rightly); or that it contributes something to the intellectual entertainment and culture (for this must be set down as a third alternative among the others mentioned). (1339a10-26)

LS: So the possible purposes of music are play, mere fun, or virtue, which means here moral virtue. He doesn’t say wisdom; he says *phronēsis*, which is practical wisdom or prudence. Sobriety one could almost say; sanity. The question is which of these is the most important end in education, and then he discusses at some length the difficulties which one encounters in trying to answer that question. He says in the sequel that the highest end is the formation of character. Perhaps we read 1339b42, which is almost the beginning of 1340a.

Reader:

Performing music is useful, as it seems, for relaxation. But nevertheless we must examine whether it is not the case that, although this has come about, yet the nature of music is more honorable than corresponds with the employment of it mentioned, and it is proper not only to participate in the common pleasure that springs from it, which is perceptible to everybody (for the pleasure contained in music is of a natural kind, owing to which the use of it is dear to those of all ages and characters), but to see if its influence reaches also in a manner to the character and to the soul. And this would clearly be the case if we are affected in our characters in a certain manner by it. But it is clear that we are affected in a certain manner by it, both by many other kinds of music and not least by the melodies of Olympus; for these admittedly make our souls enthusiastic, and enthusiasm is an affection of the character of the soul. And moreover everybody when listening to imitations is thrown into a corresponding state of feeling even apart from the rhythms and tunes themselves. (1339b42-1340a13)

LS: What he calls the corresponding state of feeling is in Greek *sympatheia*, sympathy, feeling with it. So when we see a character presented on the stage, we feel with him—say, with Macbeth, even Lady Macbeth—and this affects us, our character. We view even a murderer with different eyes to the extent we feel with Macbeth or his detestable wife. But the chief example which Aristotle gives is that of music, which makes us enthusiastic. Now in this it means

inspired by a god, possessed by a god; to be an exorcist, and then simply, loosely, to be excited. The relation of the ethical education and the education by means of enthusiasm is in a way the chief theme of the sequel. Then he discusses among other things the question: To what extent is musical performance proper for a gentleman? For the young, all right; but for a mature gentleman? And the answer is: In general, no, especially for older men. That is a long discussion in Plato's *Laws*, book 2, when he recalls the old men and funny voices—of which something must be done, because he insists on having such a chorus of the old men and therefore something must be done in order to make it compatible with the dignity they are supposed to have. Then he speaks about the various kinds of musical instruments. We might have a look at that, in 1341a17.

Reader:

And it is also clear from these considerations what sort of instruments they should use. Flutes must not be introduced into education, nor any other professional instrument, such as the harp or any other of that sort, but such instruments as will make them attentive pupils either at their musical training or in their other lessons. Moreover the flute is not a moralizing but rather an exciting influence—

LS: “Moralizing” is in Greek *ēthikon*, ethical. In English there is not this distinction made between ethical and moral: moral is limited more or less to sex and ethical to pharmacists, especially. Moral is only the Latin translation of the Greek ethics. Character-forming would be a more meaningful translation.

Reader:

The flute is not a character-forming, but rather an exciting influence—

LS: Here again the word comes from *orgia*, which is known in English by the word orgy, but [it] did not originally have this meaning but meant secret rites, secret worship, and in particular, however, the secret rites of Dionysus, of Bacchus. And therefore, given this proclivity, it could have finally the meaning which it has now. Orgiastic means exciting, so that it seems to be the same as what he calls earlier enthusiastic.

Reader:

so it ought to be used for occasions of the kind at which attendance has the effect of purification rather than instruction. (1341a17-24)

LS: Purification is an important function of music and of course also of poetry, as we know from the *Poetics*, but this is not strictly speaking ethical. Ethical means, we could say, what is edifying, building up a character; whereas the cathartic is only the purging, the getting rid of things which would be harmful to the character but is not in itself edifying. That is important for the understanding of Aristotle's *Poetics*, in the famous teaching regarding the purification of [. . .] through tragedy.

Now then we have a brief historical aside here which might be worth reading.

Reader:

Hence former ages rightly rejected its use by the young and the free, although at first they had employed it. For as they came to have more leisure because of their wealth and grew more high-spirited and valorous—

LS: More high-spirited towards virtue. In other words, they had a higher notion of virtue.

Reader:

both at a still earlier date and because after the Persian Wars they were filled with pride as the result of their achievements, they began to engage in all branches of learning, making no distinction but pursuing research further. Because of this they even included flute-playing among their studies; for in Sparta a certain chorus leader played the flute to his chorus himself and at Athens it became so fashionable that almost the majority of free men went in for flute-playing, as is shown by the tablet erected by Thrasippus after having provided the chorus for Ecphantides. But later on it came to be disapproved of as a result of actual experience, when men were more capable of judging what music conduced to virtue and what did not. (1341a25-38)

LS: According to Plutarch's essay on Alcibiades it seems to have been Alcibiades who began to reject the flute as unworthy of a free man. And one reason given, to which Aristotle refers later without mentioning [. . .] was that it distorts the face, whereas a string instrument of course does not. You cannot especially play the flute and speak or sing at the same time, and speaking is a much higher distinction of man.

This question of what is ethical, i.e., character-forming, and what is cathartic is also taken up in the sequel. The tragedy does not belong to the character-forming but to the cathartic activities, and when people say today that Aristotle is not a moralistic teacher regarding poetry—you know this moralistic teaching which played such a great role in the past, that the first task of the poets is to make man good and to make him good in a way in which nonpoetic affairs would not affect them. This is today generally despised as an [. . .] philistine view, but it was very powerful at the time.

So in order to save the honor of Aristotle, we would say: Now look, he is not a moralizer, his teachings, because catharsis is not character-forming. But for Aristotle that means the opposite. The cathartic is lower than the character-forming. That we must never forget. We may be very dissatisfied with his view of poetry, but that is one of the most striking differences between the thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that of classical antiquity. It would be interesting, but we cannot go into the whole problem of Aristotle's *Poetics*, because it is definitely outside the sphere of political science. Yet there is a link, an obvious link, between the two as is indicated by the discussions of book 8 on the *polis*.

There is a little point in 1341b, when he speaks still of flute playing.

Reader: 1341b7.

Now it is not a bad point in the story that the goddess did this out of annoyance because of the ugly distortion of her features; but as a matter of fact it is more likely that it was because

education in flute-playing has no effect on the intelligence, whereas we attribute science and art to Athena. (1341b3-7)

LS: The “we” here is very rare. Aristotle steps back into the ranks. I think I will leave this now, because we cannot possibly exhaust this book. I would rather we have a discussion if there is any issue which any of you have in mind.

Student: [. . .]^{ix}

LS: It is impossible to speak of the Greeks—what do we know what goes on in the mind of people in the mountainous district, in the outlying district, and even in Athens? The little we know is what we find in Aristophanes’s comedies, so it is very hard to say. A great scholar in the seventeenth century, who had a right to make such statements, said occasionally—he was the commentator on Hugo Grotius’s famous work on peace and war—and he said somewhere that in Aristotle there is nothing said about piety, because for the ancients living outside the church, the worship of the gods was⁶ [viewed] under the title of munificence.^x This is of course true of Aristotle. Aristotle speaks on the worship of the gods particularly in the *Ethics*, when he speaks of the virtue of munificence, meaning the right manner of making big expenses.^{xi} There is also a virtue regulating small expenses, but munificent evidently refers to the big expenses. That of course means building temples, magnificent sacrifices, and statues. Therefore there is no virtue of piety in Aristotle. [. . .] If one wants to speak in the usual traditional language, one can say the place for religion in Aristotle is the knowledge, the philosophic knowledge, of wrong. What is done in temples, that is a matter of the city, which has perhaps some character-forming quality but surely the cathartic quality of which he speaks here. That is necessary for the health of the city, to have such a large purgative enterprise. But the knowledge of the universe and the mind ruling the earth, that’s something serious.

Student: Could you make it somewhat clearer how the gentleman of leisure reflects the philosophic leisure, or how the gentleman of leisure may have status from the philosophic life?

LS: In the first place, it surely has this in common with philosophy, at least in the leisure-type activity of a respectable kind seen from the outside, what they now call sociologically. If you look at the outside, you wouldn’t find perhaps a great difference between a symposium of Athenian gentlemen and a symposium where Socrates had this same interest, just as the concept today of intellectuals is a perfect justification for what I have said. In this sense, it is a reflection, a kind of shadow of the philosophic life. Aristotle seems to have wished to make it clear toward the end of the work, just as he did toward the end of the *Ethics*, that there is such a profound difference between the political, social life, or what we can also call the ethical life, and the philosophic life. That was for him a matter of utmost importance.

^{ix} The transcriber notes that the tape is “very unclear at this point.”

^x Johann Friedrich Gronovius (1611–1671), commentator on Hugo Grotius, makes this remark in his note 9 to Prolegomena 45 of Grotius’s *De jure belli ac pacis*. Gronovius’s note was incorporated into the edition of Grotius’s work produced by Jean Barbeyrac; it can be found in Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace* (London: Innys and Manby, 1738), xxxii.

^{xi} *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.2.

Same Student: I don't have a very clear notion, though, of what you mean when you say it is a reflection.

LS: In the first place, the freedom from necessity. Most men most of the time, at least in former times, had to work very hard; and if they did not work very hard, if they led the life of a beach boy, that was for other reasons not respectable. A life devoted to a free activity, in no way enforced and which was an end in itself, what could this be? The most natural competitor to philosophy would of course be the worship of the gods, but Aristotle is characteristically silent about this. He does speak about it when he speaks of enthusiasm in music, but this is clearly subordinated, as we have seen, to the character-forming in music. For example, read the scene in the *Wasps* where this old fellow (I forget his name)^{xii} is to have been a rather impossible fellow, and is compelled by his son, his wealthy son, no longer to lead the life of a juryman—and you know he got a dole for that—but to lead the life of a gentleman. Then he tells him what he has to do. When he goes to find company [. . .] Read this; it's the only illustration I can offer at the moment. For example, people went to the theater and they saw a play, for example, by Sophocles or Euripides, and then they talked about it. This is a kind of imitation of the philosophic life. No material benefit of any kind is expected from it, and the questions raised there are questions of philosophy, although they are raised usually in a deplorably inadequate manner. But still, it is a kind of imitation. If they reminisce about how Athens was in their childhood and how it has become now, that contains possible subjects of very interesting thoughts. Whether that is sufficiently developed by most of these gentlemen can be doubted. Take Cephalus, at the beginning of the *Republic*: he is a wonderful man, in a way. I mean, quite a few of us who have read it would say: I wish I had had such a grandfather. A very attractive man at first glance, but then when you follow Plato's indications you see also his defects, and these defects make it impossible for him to follow this discussion. Therefore he leaves the moment the discussion becomes serious.

Look around a bit. In a way you will find [it] in all Platonic dialogues. For example, in the *Laches* there are two old gentlemen who have a feeling that they should have taken care of the education of their sons, which they haven't done. And someone has told them that there is a new master in a certain gymnastic art who has come to Athens, and they think they should give their sons a chance to learn this art. Then they have two very influential and distinguished gentlemen, famous generals, and so they turn to these authorities—you know, military [. . .] also in all gymnastic matters. Should the sons take these things? That is a respectable subject of gentlemen's discussion. That they would not rise to certain heights as Socrates did, that is quite true, but the question itself is a respectable question, and I think I can say everyone who does his best is blameless to that extent.

Student: You have repeatedly noted that the break between the ancients and moderns rests with Hobbes and Machiavelli but represented by a change in what is considered the [. . .] of the city. The purpose of the city for the moderns is life, and for the ancients, the good life. But what of the change which has affected Western society which comes with Christianity, which says that the highest things are action and love, and not theory?

^{xii} His name is Philocleon.

LS: That is a long question. There is a great intra-Christian controversy whether theory is not the highest; although theory in the Christian sense, contemplation, would be specifically different because it would be connected with charity. That is the point which of course is here. There is no place for charity in the Platonic or Aristotelian view of speculation. Of course, modern philosophy in the early stage, especially in Bacon, presents itself as emphatically Christian: a charitable science opposed to the proud science of classical antiquity; and charitable meant that which helps men toward the relief of their estate. Science for the sake of power, i.e., a charitable science, whereas the old one was [. . .] consequences and has been repeated again by John Dewey and other people.

ENDNOTES

Session 1

¹ Deleted “Now I would like to find some volunteers. I’m sure there are some men and women of courage among you, and I don’t have to go begging. Well, don’t embarrass me and hence embarrass yourselves. Come forth. (Two students volunteer.)”

² Changed from “work”

³ Changed from “he”

⁴ Deleted “as.”

⁵ Deleted “is – it.”

⁶ Deleted “of.”

⁷ Deleted “a.”

⁸ Deleted “factful”

⁹ Deleted “is.”

¹⁰ Deleted “the book which does this.”

¹¹ Deleted “so there is, and.”

¹² Deleted “in later times.”

¹³ Deleted “by”

¹⁴ Deleted “from”

¹⁵ Deleted “it would be very.”

¹⁶ Deleted “Then it is, as it”

¹⁷ Deleted “clearly can”

¹⁸ Deleted “but”

¹⁹ Deleted “the end will be the”

²⁰ Deleted “when I meant”

²¹ Deleted “that”

²² Deleted “but”

²³ Deleted “enviable”

²⁴ Deleted “a”

Session 2

¹ Deleted “the polis and”

² Deleted “by”

³ Deleted “that man, and this”

⁴ Deleted “or insult”

⁵ Deleted “there is not, and”

⁶ Deleted “dog”

⁷ Deleted “which,” moved “in the case of man”

⁸ Deleted “to be”

⁹ Deleted “is more”

¹⁰ Deleted “what is the part”

¹¹ Deleted “villages”

¹² Deleted “that would be”

¹³ Deleted “because”

¹⁴ Deleted “animal”

¹⁵ Deleted “Article”

¹⁶ Deleted “for”

¹⁷ Moved “very strong, or otherwise he could never be”

Session 3

- ¹ Deleted “notes”
- ² Deleted “is not in all cases, it”
- ³ Deleted “to—not”
- ⁴ Deleted “for this reason”
- ⁵ Deleted “he would say”
- ⁶ Deleted “this was taken as”
- ⁷ Deleted “there may be—and”
- ⁸ Deleted “he”
- ⁹ Deleted “to be”
- ¹⁰ Deleted “the convention”
- ¹¹ Deleted “is”
- ¹² Deleted “to”
- ¹³ Deleted “explore”
- ¹⁴ Deleted “you have the”

Session 4

- ¹ Deleted “base”
- ² Deleted “and”
- ³ Deleted “and”
- ⁴ Deleted “to”
- ⁵ Deleted “this is based”
- ⁶ Deleted “the use values”
- ⁷ Deleted “say”
- ⁸ Deleted “but”
- ⁹ Deleted “becomes”
- ¹⁰ Deleted “not”
- ¹¹ Deleted “that was”
- ¹² Deleted “Natural means”
- ¹³ Deleted “that”
- ¹⁴ Deleted “is there not some rational”
- ¹⁵ Deleted “in”
- ¹⁶ Deleted “is, it”
- ¹⁷ Deleted “says but he”
- ¹⁸ Deleted “it”
- ¹⁹ Deleted “this would be done in a”
- ²⁰ Moved “something”
- ²¹ Deleted “For it is not in accord—,” which the reader began to read from Rackham’s translation before switching over mid-sentence to Barker’s translation.
- ²² Deleted “because”
- ²³ Deleted “Plato”
- ²⁴ Deleted “There”
- ²⁵ Deleted “a”

Session 5

- ¹ Deleted “and others by”
- ² Deleted “either”
- ³ Deleted “regarding”
- ⁴ Deleted “century”
- ⁵ Deleted “it was”

⁶ Deleted “a”

⁷ Deleted “but it is surely”

⁸ The transcript reads “because apart from reason—I mean, a rational society would be a society every member of which, or at least a large majority of these members are”

⁹ Deleted “Now what Aristotle means, and therefore of”

¹⁰ Deleted “, which”

¹¹ Deleted “the”

¹² “Then” changed to “—then”

¹³ Deleted “So we are here really [...]”

¹⁴ Deleted “not a”

¹⁵ Deleted “Their only concern was”

¹⁶ Deleted “than any attacker could be”

¹⁷ Deleted “is”

¹⁸ Deleted “here”

¹⁹ Deleted “[. . .] quite a few interesting passages, and I’m willing to stay here for one more question, if someone has one. In former times I stayed with my class until six, but I’m no longer so well”. The transcriber indicated that there were no additional questions.

Session 6

¹ Deleted “this verse”

² Deleted “there”

³ Deleted “critical”

⁴ Deleted “you are much”

⁵ Deleted “of the dissatisfaction”

⁶ Deleted “the more”

⁷ Deleted “the literal”

⁸ Deleted “these kind of”

⁹ Deleted “president”

¹⁰ Deleted “science”

¹¹ Deleted “that”

¹² Deleted “it would be”

Session 7

¹ Deleted “who”

² Deleted “mortally defensive”

³ Deleted “in”

⁴ Deleted “is”

⁵ Deleted “dog”

⁶ Deleted “they”

⁷ Deleted “feathers”

⁸ Deleted “they must”

⁹ Deleted “and”

¹⁰ Deleted “a kind of”

¹¹ Deleted “there could be”

¹² Deleted “some, in order to be a voting citizen”

¹³ Deleted “is”

¹⁴ Deleted “and not only”

¹⁵ Deleted “a”

¹⁶ Deleted “there”

- ¹⁷ Deleted “a”
- ¹⁸ Deleted “take”
- ¹⁹ Deleted “is that”
- ²⁰ Deleted “not”
- ²¹ Deleted “which is”
- ²² Deleted “has no”
- ²³ Deleted “say”
- ²⁴ Deleted “it is what”
- ²⁵ Deleted “then”
- ²⁶ Deleted “means”
- ²⁷ Deleted “the general”
- ²⁸ Deleted “it”

Session 8

- ¹ Deleted “is”
- ² Deleted “is”
- ³ Deleted “speaks of”
- ⁴ Deleted “would also amount to—this”
- ⁵ Deleted “in”
- ⁶ Deleted “a”

Session 9

- ⁷ Deleted “not the”
- ¹ Deleted “granted”
- ² Deleted “type”
- ³ Deleted “as”
- ⁴ Deleted “or”
- ⁵ Deleted “senseless”
- ⁶ Deleted “image”
- ⁷ Deleted “for”
- ⁸ Deleted “who”

Session 10

- ¹ Deleted “there is only”
- ² Deleted “wealth”
- ³ Deleted “18th”
- ⁴ Deleted “contingent”
- ⁵ Deleted “roots”
- ⁶ Deleted “not”
- ⁷ Deleted “being”
- ⁸ Deleted “family”

Session 11

- ¹ Deleted “imperial”
- ² Deleted “it takes”
- ³ Deleted “survived”
- ⁴ Deleted “state”
- ⁵ Deleted “won over”

- ⁶ Deleted “every”
- ⁷ Deleted “other times”
- ⁸ Deleted “have”
- ⁹ Deleted “ago”

Session 12

- ¹ Deleted “that”
- ² Deleted “as”
- ³ Deleted “the”
- ⁴ Deleted “was”
- ⁵ Deleted “of all regimes”
- ⁶ Deleted “A thing common in democracy and oligarchy,” which the reader here began to read before moving back to a slightly earlier point in the text.
- ⁷ Deleted “liberal”
- ⁸ Deleted “dowry”
- ⁹ Deleted “precisely”
- ¹⁰ Deleted “counter”

Session 13

- ¹ Deleted “A constitution of this sort will have a lot (inaudible),” which the reader here began to read before moving back to a slightly earlier point in the text.
- ² Deleted “did”
- ³ Changed from “to”
- ⁴ Deleted “but”
- ⁵ Deleted “where Aristotle describes (inaudible)”
- ⁶ Deleted “you must have”
- ⁷ Deleted “after having”
- ⁸ Deleted “body”

Session 14

- ¹ Deleted “is so”
- ² Deleted “what is”
- ³ Deleted “endeared”
- ⁴ Deleted “they”
- ⁵ Deleted “to”
- ⁶ Deleted “by”
- ⁷ Deleted “not a”
- ⁸ Deleted “and”
- ⁹ Deleted “that”
- ¹⁰ Deleted “about”
- ¹¹ Moved “would”
- ¹² Deleted “strangers”

Session 15

- ¹ Deleted “that”
- ² Deleted “there is”
- ³ Deleted “do not wish to”

- ⁴ Deleted “that”
- ⁵ Deleted “that”
- ⁶ Deleted “than”
- ⁷ Deleted “life”
- ⁸ Deleted “of”
- ⁹ Deleted “stay”
- ¹⁰ Deleted “intelligent”

Session 16

9

- ² Deleted “there is”
- ³ Deleted “has much more”
- ⁴ Deleted “government”
- ⁵ Deleted “since”
- ⁶ Deleted “a fraud”